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Testimony in **Support** of **SB 272**
Under 18 - Indefinite Life Sentence - Special Parole Eligibility
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Good morning, Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Seitz, Ranking Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony for Senate Bill 272. My name is Stefanie Tengler. I was born and raised in Germany, and moved to the U.S. at the age of 21. I am now thirty years old. This past March, I became a U.S. citizen. I currently live in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I began my teaching career through Teach for America and now work as a public school teacher. I support Senate Bill 272, because I believe in the tremendous potential of our children. I see it not only in my work as an educator, but also when I visit my fiancé. Joshua is serving 56 years to life since the age of sixteen. He has been incarcerated for over eleven years.

As current law stands, he will be parole eligible in 2061. By then, he would be 72 years old. Not allowing any meaningful second chance to our most troubled teens guarantees that the citizens of Ohio will continue to pay incredible amounts of money for the housing, feeding, and medical care of these young individuals for decades to come, without any noticeable benefit to the public. Taking Joshua as an example, we pay more than \$22,000 to keep him locked up this year. If locked up for life, we would spend well over a million dollars for his incarceration.

Besides the economic benefit, there is another reason why this bill is so important for our state. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that as a society, we can be judged by what we do for our children. The right thing to do is to let these young men and women prove that they are deserving of a second chance. Many of them didn't have a first chance to begin with. Josh, for instance, grew up in an extremely impoverished neighborhood, where gun violence, substance abuse, and prostitution were the norm. His father was addicted to crack cocaine, his mother

struggled to provide for her children, and at the age of nine, Joshua was sexually abused by one of his uncles. This abuse went on for years.

Does it excuse the crime he committed? Absolutely not. He takes full responsibility for what he did, lives with great remorse every single day, and understands that he deserves to be punished. However, by keeping him locked up for life, we're not righting his wrong. Retribution does not equal healing. Healing begins when we let love in. Healing begins with change.

Josh has changed so much since he was first locked up. For almost five years now, I have witnessed how hard-working and caring an individual he has become. He earned his GED in prison, is currently completing a paralegal program consistently earning high grades, and works at the prison library. He participates in a variety of programs, such as The Family is First Project and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program through Xavier University, to mention just a few. He also trains service dogs for children with special needs. In short, he is doing everything possible from behind bars to give back to the community. Josh is not an exception. A lot of teenage lifers have the potential to lead productive lives amongst us. All we have to do is give them a second chance. Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.