



Towards Employment

Senate Bill 3: Proponent Testimony

From: Towards Employment

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Good morning members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bishara Addison I live in Shaker Height's Oh, represented by Representative Janine Boyd and Senator Sandra Williams. However, I am here as a representative from Towards Employment, a workforce development agency in Cleveland OH, serving Cuyahoga County. In 2018, of the 600 individuals we placed in jobs, 400 had criminal records. Thus, I am here to provide proponent testimony for SB3, which I believe has the potential to have a substantial positive impact on those we serve who are working hard to take advantage of a second chance, land a living wage job, and take care of their families.

As a workforce development agency that serves adults with criminal records, we know first-hand the barriers individuals face as they try and navigate the labor market. Research shows that "serving time reduces hourly wages for men by 11%, annual employment by 9 weeks, and annual earnings by 40%."¹ According to recent ODRC reports, in Cuyahoga County, of the nearly 21,000 individuals released from State Prison each year, over 13% return to Cuyahoga County alone. Year over year, we see a steady number of individuals released from prison who come to Towards Employment for career services. Removing barriers to employment for those with criminal convictions is a key priority for our organization and is also critical for our community if we want to ensure that individuals who want to work are able, and employers who are looking to expand their talent pool with non-traditional candidates can, especially in a tight labor market.

Senate Bill 3 has the potential to have a significant impact on those Towards Employment serves. Of our 400 reentry graduates last year that we placed in jobs, nearly a third had drug related offenses, mostly drug possession. According to a report from Policy Matters OH, there are 524 distinct laws – called collateral sanctions – bar Ohioans from employment in a wide array of jobs based on a drug conviction. Of those, 56 percent apply only to felonies. Their research shows that jobs affected by collateral sanctions pay \$4,700 more on average, and are growing at twice the rate of other jobs.

At the same time, employers need skilled workers. Ohio is facing a skills gap where Middle-skill jobs account for 55 percent of Ohio's labor market, but only 47 percent of the state's workers are trained to the middle-skill level. Key industries in Ohio are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs.

We appreciate you Senator Eklund, and the Ohio Senate Leadership for your commitment to criminal justice reform! Senate Bill 3 has the potential to do a few things if we take an approach through policy to remove artificial barriers to employment, provide second chances, and widen the talent pool for

¹ The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*, Washington, D.C., 2010, pg 4, www.economicmobility.org



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employers. The most crucial element to ensuring that Senate Bill 3 has the biggest impact is for it to have retroactive application. Meaning that, the reclassification of F4/F5 drug possession offenses (with a few key exceptions) would apply not only to those who commit new offenses but also those that have already served their time but are still living with the impact of a felony conviction. Those are the individuals Towards Employment serves. This means that our participants that have already paid their debt to society would be in a better position to access employment in the growing industries in NE Ohio.

We strongly urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support legislation that has retroactive application so that individuals like the 100 reentry graduates we served last year with drug possession offenses benefit.

Thank you so much for your time to listen to me this morning, and we look forward to working with you all on positioning SB3 to have widest impact possible for those who are eager to participate in our labor market yet have a felony that prevents them from a living wage.