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Testimony in Support of SB 288
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Ohio Poverty Law Center
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 288. I am Zack Eckles, policy associate for the Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC), a nonprofit whose mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

In Ohio, approximately one in three Ohioans residents has a criminal record of some kind, and 1 in 4 jobs are legally off limits to Ohioans with a criminal record.¹ This means that millions of Ohioans face barriers to employment and occupational licensing due to their criminal record, disproportionately affecting low income people and communities of color and further perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Today, I am happy to provide testimony in support of several aspects of SB 288 that will make it easier for Ohioans to break that cycle.

Criminal records make it difficult to find work long after an individual has paid their debt to society, but criminal record sealing and Certificates of Qualification for Employment make it easier for more Ohioans to get back to work. Unfortunately, local courts will often charge far more than the \$50 application fees specified in R.C. § 2953.32 and R.C. § 2953.25. We fully support the changes made by SB 288 to strengthen the language limiting these fees to \$50 so more Ohioans can afford to get back to work.

In addition to a criminal record, driver's license suspensions also create a significant barrier for Ohioans trying to get back to work. SB 288's removal of discretionary driver's license suspension for minor misdemeanor marijuana or paraphernalia possession, and removal of those convictions from the list of offenses that are disqualifying for licenses, employment, and certification, are both important steps in getting more otherwise qualified Ohioans back to work.

Finally, we are also supportive of SB 288's efforts to continue the work of the 133rd General Assembly in revising occupational licensing law for individuals with criminal records. As a result of passage of the 133rd General Assembly's House Bill 263, occupational licensing agencies are required to create a list of disqualifying offenses that are directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the licensed occupation. SB 288's moratorium on enforcement of new collateral sanctions will provide occupational licensing agencies with time to implement the new requirements of HB 263.

Thank you for the work you have done in developing SB 288 and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of it today.

¹ See https://ohiojpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2021_annual_report_for_site.pdf