



Chair Abrams, Members of the Committee, my name is Patrick Plein and I am the Director of CPAC's Nolan Center for Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about our views on this critical issue.

CPAC is the nation's oldest conservative grass roots organization, founded in 1964 by William F. Buckley as the American Conservative Union works in support of policies that advance economic freedom, personal liberty, and the strength of the American family.

Alongside our flagship annual conference in DC, you all may be familiar the CPAC Foundation ratings as well, where we evaluate every bill considered by every legislature chamber – both federal and state – to develop ratings of elected officials using consistent and transparent criteria. This herculean task provides citizens with an objective measure of their political representatives' voting records. Indeed, members of this Committee have some of the highest ACU ratings in the state. Those ratings can be found on our web page at: ratings.conservative.org.

CPAC stands in firm support of efforts to make communities across the country safer and promote economic growth and recovery. When I testify, I'm often met with quizzical looks. Too many assume that because we are conservatives, we oppose advancements to our justice system. But in fact, it is just the opposite. *We support criminal justice proposals because of our conservatism, not in spite of it.* Our belief is that the current iteration of our justice system provides too little public safety, yet costs too much in terms of lives, families, and taxpayer dollars, all while tightening the government's hand around individual sovereignty. Indeed, this was why CPAC worked closely with President Trump on landmark federal criminal justice legislation, known as the *First Step Act*.

Ohioans – indeed all Americans – deserve a justice system that makes our communities safer, holds the government accountable for how it spends our money and treats our citizens, and advances human dignity. It is through this lens that CPAC is in strong support of the GROW Act.

I do not need to recap the legislation before you. Suffice to say, the bill would provide for the automatic expungement of certain non-violent criminal convictions. Because traditional expungement is complicated and time consuming, ex-offenders often need an attorney to navigate the process. And as such, it is an expensive proposition for most people. That is why so few Ohioans who are currently eligible to have their records sealed in the state actually do so within five years.

Why is expungement so important? The answer is public safety, through the mechanism of gainful economic participation. Study after study, as well as common sense, tell us that the surest way to stay on the straight and narrow and successfully re-enter society is to find meaningful work. But with a criminal conviction, an individual is half as likely to even get a job interview. Even if he/she gets an offer, the salary is often 30% less than that paid to a comparable employee who doesn't have a criminal record. By providing a way to seal a criminal record, we can make it easier for ex-offenders to find work. This will not only help Ohio's economy recover rapidly, it will make our communities safer.

Those who oppose policy like this often do so with no rationale that serves the interest of public safety or improving the economy. While only a few serious crimes merit a life sentence, unfortunately many minor charges become exactly that – a lifelong punishment. We brand people as ‘criminals’ and this brand comes to define how people see us long before we have a chance to demonstrate our worth by earning a second chance, long after we have paid the price of our wrongdoings, and until we breathe our last breath.

Today, the Committee has an opportunity to put in place a policy that will help the economy recover, cut recidivism, and provide our fellow Ohioans with the dignity of work. And it is consistent with President Trump’s view that: “America is a nation that believes in the power of redemption. America is a nation that believes in second chances.” On behalf of CPAC and its 200,000 + activists who support our public safety efforts, I urge you to approve HB 460.