



**Testimony on Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition
Sunset Review Committee
August 28, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Hillyer, and members of the Sunset Review Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ronette Burkes, I have the pleasure of serving as the Deputy Director in the Office of Reentry at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC). I am here today to testify on behalf of the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition (OERC).

I would like to begin by providing information regarding the make-up of the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition. The Coalition was created by HB 130 of the 127th General Assembly, is governed by R.C. 5120.07 and consists of 17 appointed members or their designees. The makeup of the Coalition includes directors from over 10 cabinet level agencies, two members from each legislative chamber, a member from a health licensing board and a justice involved individual. Additionally, the members serve without compensation.

Furthermore, the Coalition meets periodically for the purpose of formulating, discussing, and developing policies and practices that facilitate the expansion and improvement of reentry services provided by state and local agencies in the collaborative efforts of those agencies to reintegrate people transitioning from incarceration into society. All of this while simultaneously maintaining public safety and reducing recidivism in this state.

The inherent principles of the Coalition are also found in the mission of DRC which is to reduce recidivism among those we touch (who spend time with DRC) and its vision to reduce crime in Ohio. As such, DRC Director Annette Chambers-Smith actively serves in the role of Coalition chairperson, as defined by statute, and personally attends each meeting. Further, the Director engages in the development of each meeting agenda and the identification of meeting priorities as well as involvement in actively seeking funding opportunities for the local reentry coalitions.

It is important to note that the funding sources for local reentry coalitions across the state vary, and many local reentry coalitions face routine challenges to secure support for their important work throughout Ohio communities. Thus, local reentry coalitions are commonly reliant on federal and/or local funding as well as donations. Over the past two years, with the support of generous seed money from DRC of almost 2 million dollars collectively, local reentry coalition services were expanded from 25 counties covered to 63 counties covered within the past 2 years. The remaining 25 counties are supported by other reentry partners and alliances.

Based on the 2022-2023 ODRC Reentry Coalition Expansion grant report, financial and legal fees



consumed 29% of the overall funding. Numerous individuals released from incarceration have substantial debt which include court fees and reinstatement fees in addition to the challenges of securing stable housing, reliable transportation, and permanent employment. Many of types of debt , if not paid, carry additional legal consequences. Housing and rental assistance consumed 17% of the grant monies. Housing instability is a critical factor that impedes successful reentry and can significantly influence recidivism. Finding and obtaining stable housing is one of the greatest reentry challenges, and is well documented in research literature.

The Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition has consistently shown its value to the State of Ohio, and past work of the Coalition includes the development of a five-year strategic plan (2009-2014) that continues to direct the OERC today. This strategic plan outlines core principles which are intended to guide stakeholders in addressing several reentry related areas that included but were not limited to: increased employment opportunity, increased participation in substance misuse disorder services, increased family engagement in reentry, and increased participation in behavioral health services. The inherent principles of the Coalition are grounded in collaboration and engagement with local communities. Notable success has been due in part to strengthening collaborations among key stakeholders and taking innovative approaches to treatment/service delivery. The establishment of these relationships has resulted in successful reintegration outcomes for many returning citizens. The Coalition is consistently executing our strategic plan, while innovative ideas and brainstorming continue as Coalition members examine opportunities to develop a continuum of supportive networks that lead to successful reentry and increased public safety. Within the past year, the Office of Reentry leadership met with each member of the OERC individually to identify additional services supporting the Coalition's initiatives, which led to more information sharing, local reentry coalition training and better access to resources.

In conclusion, Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Hillyer and members of the Committee, I would urge that the committee recommend reauthorization of the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition due to its vital importance in supporting the successful return of formerly incarcerated people to local communities throughout the state. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The following is a list of the Ohio Ex-Offender Membership as of August 27, 2024:



- Director Annette Chambers-Smith, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
- Director Ursel McElroy, Ohio Department of Aging
- Director Kevin Miller, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities
- Director Sheryl Creed Maxfield, Ohio Department of Commerce
- Chancellor Mike Duffey, Ohio Department of Higher Education
- Director Kim Hauck, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
- Dr. Bruce T. Vanderhoff, Ohio Department of Health
- Jack Brubaker, Legislative Liaison, Ohio Health Licensing Board
- Director Stephen Dackin, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce
- Director Matthew Damschroder, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
- Director Lori Criss, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Director Andy Wilson, Ohio Department of Public Safety
- Maj. Gen. (Ret) Debbie Ashenurst, Ohio Department of Veteran's Services
- Director Lydia Mihalik, Ohio Department of Development
- Director Amy Ast, Ohio Department of Youth Services
- Director Felicia King, Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives
- Senator Nathan Manning, Ohio Senate
- Representative Latyna Humphrey and Representative Cindy Abrams, Ohio House
- Dr. Patrice Palmer, Restored Citizen Representative