



**Testimony on Office of Enterprise Development Advisory Board
Sunset Review Committee
August 28, 2024**

Greetings, Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Hillyer and members of the Sunset Review Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Vernise Robinson, and I serve as the Workforce Development Administrator for the Office of Enterprise (Workforce) Development within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). Thank you for providing me an opportunity to share about our office.

Under the purview of the Ohio Central School System within the Office of Holistic Services, the Office of Enterprise Development (OED) functions to focus efforts to reduce recidivism and increase public safety for all Ohioans by increasing training and employment opportunities for incarcerated persons and for those formerly incarcerated and residing in the community. The goal of OED is to expand the number of partnerships with the private sector and to develop a plethora of opportunities that are mutually beneficial to the Department, incarcerated persons, private companies, and Ohio taxpayers. These collaborations will not only make Ohio's communities a safer place to live but will also create employment opportunities that will allow those returning, to return with a "hand up and not a handout" and contribute to a thriving Ohio workforce. Simply put, the Office of Enterprise Development functions to train the incarcerated population to build Ohio's workforce.

As affirmed in Section 5145.162 of the Ohio Revised Code, The Office of Enterprise Development (OED) advisory board serves as an objective review and recommendation body for business proposals submitted to OED, which are forwarded to the Director for approval. The OED hosts quarterly meetings with its members to provide updates and make recommendations on new partnerships. When the office is contacted about a partnership, the OED Administrator completes an initial screening of the proposal by interviewing the interested company, fact-finding, benchmarking, etc. Once the proposal passes screening process, it moves forward to



the Advisory Board who conducts the final vetting and to ensure it meets the minimum qualifications and expectations. The Advisory Board convenes to review all submitted documents as well as hear from the potential partner about their desire to establish a partnership. Upon completion of the meeting, the Advisory Board members discuss and make a recommendation to the ODRC Director for final approval. These meetings are held quarterly in March, June, September, and December. If necessary, special meetings are scheduled to review proposals prior to the scheduled meeting. The Office of Enterprise Development is managed by the ODRC Workforce Development Administrator and does not have any full-time staff members assigned.

The Office of Enterprise Development has not incurred any expenses for quarterly meetings. By statute, each member of the advisory board receives no compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses in the performance of official duties of the board. Members of the board who are state employees are reimbursed for expenses pursuant to travel rules.

Guiding principles for business partnerships is to reduce recidivism through training and employment opportunities; significantly increase incarcerated person jobs in the community and at Ohio Penal Industries (OPI) through business partnerships; increase apprenticeship and educational opportunities; and instill positive work ethics.

Since 2022 the OED has established partnerships with 11 private companies who employ more than 55 incarcerated persons (IP) between them, and they earn between \$11 and \$30 per hour. Some of the IP's have since been released and have maintained employment at these companies. The OPI has 9 partnerships with over 100 IP's employed.

In conclusion, Chairman Wilkin and members of the Sunset Review Committee, we would urge that the committee recommend continuation of the Office of Enterprise Development Advisory Board due to its importance in supporting the mission of the Department.



OED Advisory Board Members

Vernise Robinson, Administrator, ODRC, OED Advisory Board Chair

Chris Albanese, Executive Director, CIIC, Ex-Officio Member

William Ashburn, Workforce Project Manager, Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation

Roberta Banks, Chief, Bureau of Personnel, ODRC

Ronette Burkes-Trowsdell, Deputy Directory, Office of Reentry, ODRC

Chris Ferruso, Legislative Director, National Federation of Independent Businesses

Ann King, Chief, Ohio Penal Industries, ODRC

Ken Kopycinski, Chief of Acquisition & Contract Compliance, ODRC

Tony Long, General Counsel, Ohio Chamber of Commerce

Kerrie Ryan, Deputy Director, Office of Administration, ODRC

John Rush, President and CEO, Clean Turn/180 Demo

Jennifer Sanders, School Superintendent, Ohio Central School System, ODRC

Byron Turner, Attorney, Legal Services, ODRC

Lyneal Wainwright, Internal Reentry Administrator, Office of Reentry, ODRC