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**Prepared Statement of Bob Claire in Support of Ex-Offender Bill SB 157 before the
State of Maryland Judicial Proceedings Committee**

Good afternoon members of the Senate. My name is Bob Claire and I am the General Manager of Mobern Lighting Company a manufacturer of energy efficient lighting solutions based in Jessup. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and to speak in support of the Ex-offender Bill SB 157.

For those of you who don't know, Mobern has been manufacturing lighting fixtures in Howard County since 1957. We offer above minimum wage starting pay; group health, life and dental care benefits and 401K participation to all of our full-time employees. We offer a safe and upbeat manufacturing environment. Our workforce is our business and we were a staunch supporter of the Justice Reinvestment Act signed last year.

70% of our 80+ person workforce employs low-tech assembly and warehouse workers who come from all walks of life within Howard, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel and Baltimore counties proximate to the Rt.1 industrial corridor. Many any of our workers come from underserved sectors of our community comprised mainly of youth, homeless, and disabled and, on point with the Bill read today, ex-offender populations. Unfortunately, because of stigma, chance of recidivism, workplace risk and corporate culture, employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders. Others are prohibited from hiring ex-offenders by

law or contract. These impediments drastically reduce the number of willing Maryland employers and – by extension – Maryland job positions available to ex-offenders, particularly those with non-violent records. We all know the consequences of not assimilating ex-offenders back into the community and that the assimilation starts with a good paying and stable job in a work environment that accepts ex-offenders for who they are and in spite of the legal, social and economic challenges they face. Although many in our business community are sensitive to the challenges our communities face in getting ex-offenders into the workforce, many I speak to will not hire ex-offenders because they say “their insurance won’t permit it.” What they really mean is that they don’t want to take the risk of being sued for knowingly hiring an ex-offender. In the current business and legal climate, no one can blame them.

We view the pending legislation as a direct response to concerns businesses have when hiring ex-offenders and we applaud Sen. Cassilly for taking a stand in proposing this Bill to eliminate the risk to certain important employers for knowingly hiring ex-offenders. We hope this committee supports the legislation too.

Thank you.

Bob Claire
General Manager
Mobern Lighting Company
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