

Testimony of Marsha Netus  
Vice President and Regional Director for America Works of Maryland, Inc.

Thank you committee members for the opportunity to testify today. It is an honor to sit before you to discuss our organization and testify on the behalf of our partnership with the Work First Foundation and the Jobs Pilot Program. I am Marsha Netus, Vice President and Regional Director for America Works of Maryland, Inc. (AWMD) and Washington, DC (AWDC). AWMD is a subsidiary of the America Works network of companies, founded in 1984 by Dr. Lee Bowes and Peter Cove with the core value that work should be the foundation for upward mobility. Since 1997, our Baltimore office has worked with various disadvantaged populations such as TANF or welfare to work, SNAP recipients, individuals receiving disability benefits, and Justice involved or returning citizens. Our motto is quite simple, there is a job for everyone, its matching the right person with the right opportunity. Through our national network of employers, our employer-centered contextualized training programs, and prescreening model, we have placed over one million people into long-term employment nationwide. We strongly believe in performance based models as the true measurement for accurate results, while holding vendors accountable for true customer success.

AWMD customer partnership includes extensive outreach services, building relations, employment preparation, intensive case management, educational/training services, and most importantly job placement and retention services. We have an extensive network of community partners throughout the area which provide additional wrap around services for those in need.

Since 2010, through support from the Abell Foundation, the Work First Foundation (WFF) has successfully provided direct job training, placement, and retention services to justice-involved individuals in Baltimore City with its collaborative partner, America Works of Maryland, Inc. (AWMD). The Baltimore Exoffender Reentry Employment Program (BERE) has served between 100 and 200 individuals per year, for an approximate total of 1533 individuals to date. 61% have been placed into full -time employment ultimately leading to 69% reaching 180 days retention.

In June 2017 AWMD collaborated with the WFF to examine innovative solutions to the predatory cash bail system. The goal is to reduce unnecessary jail time and avoid the criminal justice system while providing alternatives to incarceration through economic stability of employment. Holding defendants without bail not only results in stress on family members, loss of employment, and potential loss of housing, but could have long lasting implications on the person's wellbeing. The WFF and America Works partnered with Baltimore City District Court Judge Pastore on a bail diversion initiative. Instead of forcing low-income individuals to sit in jail as they await trial, presumed innocent, the Bail Diversion Program refers them to job readiness and placement services through the Work First Foundation, giving them the opportunity to be productive members of society through employment. The goal would be an added resource to help judges have the confidence that defendants can be released safely in their community and will attend trial. Through this program, defendants are referred to a pre-trial agent who is in daily contact with AWMD to update the status of each pretrial participant. When defendants are referred to AWMD for services, their immediate needs, such as stable housing, childcare, transportation and professional clothing are assessed. After the assessment, they are immediately enrolled in job

training services and meet with an AWMD Sales Representative to find an employment position that fits their skills and qualifications. As of January 2020, we are proud to share we have placed 134 participants into full-time employment; 86% have been retained for 30 days, 79% for 90 days, and 66% for 180 days. Due to our long-standing relationship in the Baltimore Metro area, we are partnered with employers willing to hire the person despite having open charges. They are interested in giving a person a second chance. These jobs include warehouse, construction, food service, telemarketing, and customer service. We are also pleased to share 77.3% of cases have been acquitted, Nolle processed or STET. These are charges where 70% are accused of a violent crime primarily second degree assault and 22% have drug related charges. The success of the program is picking up attention from large research organizations such as Manpower Demonstration Research Corp (MDRC) who are interested in conducting advanced research. The WFF and AWMD met with the offices of Senators Van Hollen, Booker, Harris, and Paul who have expressed interest in the program.

The long-term impact of this program cuts the State cost of imprisoning an individual while helping them build a level of stability through self-sufficiency. We would like to thank Judge Pastore for her diligent work with this population, the Abell Foundation for continued support, and we look forward to the committee supporting Senate Bill 574.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and I appreciate your time.