

Testimony of Veronica Bido

HB 785

8 February 2022

I would like to thank Delegate Lewis, the Chairman, and members of this committee for taking the time to hear my testimonial today. My name is Veronica Bido and I am a Fellow through the Work First Foundation working with America Works of Maryland, Inc. I assist in managing and supporting the Bail Diversion program put forth by the Work First Foundation and its partnership with the Baltimore City District Court Project (DCREP). Our Bail Diversion program is the only program under the DCREP programs that address alternatives to incarceration. At the core of our work at America Works is assisting marginalized communities and connecting hard to serve groups with employment opportunities and workforce development training. Our Bail diversion program is no exception, and everyone who participates has access to our support and resources. I hope to illustrate the positive impact of this program and the benefits to ensure the continuation as well as the expansion of the program.

Throughout the country, there has been a call to action for bail reform. The state of Maryland followed this call to action in February of 2017 with the aim to reduce unreasonable high cash bail amounts and promote the release of defendants on their own recognizance as much as possible. The high cost of bail can create a high burden that many individuals cannot endure. It puts individuals in an unstable situation where employment, family, and stability are at risk. The enactment of bail reform has prevented people from being detained for not being able to afford bail.

Our Bail Diversion program plays a critical part in helping the participants on a path to stability by providing resources and support. It is important to understand that our program does

not absolve accountability. The program is unique, as it is one of the few in the entire country that actually utilizes employment and economic empowerment as an alternative to bail. Our program is more than keeping people out of detention. We are partners alongside the participants in helping them to realize their own potential and apply themselves to find purposeful employment. It is that partnership with the participants that have led to the success we have observed.

Through this program we are able to provide support and work first development training ranging from 2 weeks to a year, putting participants in the best position possible to obtain employment. Since the beginning of this program, we have had over 400 participants. The percentage of participants who utilize our training is approximately 89%. The majority of participants have a positive outcome at their trials; with no incarceration or probation. The Judges that are involved in our program have had a first-hand view of the success of the participants and given them another opportunity.

Most importantly, if there is nothing else you take from my testimonial; is that when we work with one participant we are not just helping them, but their families. I urge the committee today to support the HB 785. The Work First Foundation's Bail Diversion program and partnership with the District Court Re-Entry Project has proven to be successful and impactful. Our program has the potential to transform the bail and pretrial across Maryland, but the country. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica Bido