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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB 305 – QUALIFYING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS – INCARCERATED
INDIVIDUAL TRAINING AND REENTRY GRANT FUND – EXTENSION

A 2024 report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce found that “[f]ormerly incarcerated individuals experience extreme rates of unemployment, hovering around **six out of every 10 people** being jobless from the time of release to four years after release.”¹ With approximately 86,000 people being released from Maryland jails or prisons each year,² getting out while remaining out of work has devastating impacts on formerly incarcerated people, including increasing their risk of housing and food insecurity,³ substance use disorder,⁴ and poor physical and mental health outcomes.⁵

These risks, in turn, drive up the likelihood of recidivism and reincarceration.⁶ Put simply, without genuine opportunities to learn, work, grow, and thrive, thousands of Marylanders could remain in a vicious cycle of committing crimes out of desperation and returning to incarceration, only to be released again and face similarly dismal, if not worse, prospects of employment. This cycle not only destroys the lives of the people trapped within it, but also threatens public safety and stunts economic growth. Releasing

¹ Stephanie Ferguson et. al, *Data Deep Dive: The Workforce Impact of Second Chance Hiring*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (May 25, 2022) (emphasis added), <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>.

² Leah Wang, *Since You Asked: How Many Women and Men Are Released from Each State’s Prisons and Jails Every Year?*, PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE (Feb. 28, 2024), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/releases-ex-state/>. This study is based on data from 2019.

³ Jude Al Abosy et. al, *Determinants and Consequences of Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Justice-Impacted Populations*, CURRENT NUTRITION REPORTS (May 24, 2022), https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9126700/pdf/13668_2022_Article_421.pdf.

⁴ Adam Chamberlain et. al, *Illicit substance use after release from prison among formerly incarcerated primary care patients: a cross-sectional study*, ADDICTION SCIENCE & CLINICAL PRACTICE (2019), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13722-019-0136-6>.

⁵ Kamala Mallik-Kane and Christy Visher, *Health and Prisoner Reentry: How Physical, Mental, and Substance Abuse Conditions Shape the Process of Reintegration*, URBAN INSTITUTE JUSTICE POLICY CENTER (Feb. 2008), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/31491/411617-Health-and-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>.

⁶ See, e.g., *supra* note 3.

incarcerated people without giving them the resources to reintegrate into their communities is **not** justice. We **must** break this cycle.

One organization striving to that end is Vehicles for Change (VFC), which repairs and awards donated vehicles to low-income families in Maryland. In 2015, VFC launched its Full Circle Auto Training Center: a reentry internship program for formerly incarcerated people that trains them as automotive technicians. Programs like the Full Circle Auto Training Center are a lifeline for formerly incarcerated people hoping to obtain employment and successfully reenter their communities, but these programs need financial support if they are to help break the cycle of criminality and carcerality.

In this regard, Senate Bill 305 is a substantial step forward. The bill carries the momentum of Senate Bill 181 from the 2024 Session, which authorizes the Governor to appropriate \$1 million in the annual budget for fiscal years 2026 through 2028 toward grants for certain nonprofit organizations providing training in automotive repair to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people. SB 181 passed by a large margin: 46–0 in the Senate and 111–23 in the House of Delegates. Now, SB 305 seeks to extend the period in which the Governor may make this annual appropriation to fiscal year 2029. The bill also updates the statutory language to reflect the new name of the Governor’s office administering the grants: the Office of Crime Prevention & Policy.

Ensuring the success of formerly incarcerated people, alongside the safety of our communities and growth of our economy, necessitates continued investment in the education and training of people who have experienced (and who continue to experience) life behind bars. Without such steps, the cycle of crime, punishment, release, and re-offense will simply continue, while harming the lives and livelihoods of people across Maryland. SB 181 started the engine, and SB 305 will allow for the continued drive toward justice. Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 305.