

My name is Anna Kohn. I am the Chief Impact Officer at RecoveryPark; a recently-appointed member of Michigan's Community Corrections Board; and Vice President of Safe and Just Michigan, formerly the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending here in Lansing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of the honorable members of Michigan's State House and State Senate this morning.

I am here today to read into record testimony from RecoveryPark's Founder and CEO Gary Wozniak, and I share Mr. Wozniak's encouragement and endorsement of the bills in front of you.

RecoveryPark exists to create jobs for people with barriers to employment. We deploy this mission by launching food-based businesses on Detroit's east side, starting with RecoveryPark Farms which grows specialty produce for chefs, and maintains a workforce largely of returning citizens. We provide opportunities for individuals transitioning from prisons, jails, shelters, and drug treatment facilities to gain permanent and supportive employment.

After graduating from college, I began to assess my career options and determine the best path to make a significant income. I found this path as a young stock broker in the 1980s. This line of work took me down the path of managing stress with illegal drugs, which quickly created an addiction that led me to a drug treatment facility, SHAR House, in 1987. Because I used my financial clients' money to support my addiction, I was sent to federal prison from 1988-1991. Upon my release, I realized the tremendous burden that returning citizens face in transitioning from a punitive, structured environment to one without routine, where an individual becomes responsible for his or her well-being.

I'll never forget the day that I decided not to accept the fate to which many returning citizens are relegated. I applied and interviewed for a job at Enterprise Rent-a-Car. When they denied me the opportunity and I asked why, I was told that because of my felony record, I would not be able to obtain even an entry-level position as a rental car clerk. Upon my return home, I looked in the mirror and promised myself that I'd never let anyone tell me "no" again. Scouting business opportunities, I was introduced to the Jet's Pizza franchise, and launched my first Jet's Pizza business in Hamtramck. Seven businesses later, I reconnected with the treatment center where I found myself in 1987 which was in the midst of a major financial crisis, facing shutdown. The CEO at the time was a friend and recovering addict as well, and since recovering

programs, casting a wider net for a talented workforce that is often left behind because of the 'scarlet letter' on their records.

Reevaluating occupational licensure includes examining the kinds of elements that prohibit returning citizens from moving forward in life. If an individual has obtained certain skill sets and certifications during his or her institutionalization, we as the public need to create a pathway for those skill sets to be deployed upon release. The kinds of regulations that exist and prohibit individuals from working in, for example, barber shops simply because they utilize blood-drawn tools are restrictive and burdensome despite the fact that an individual may have spent the last 20 years cutting hair in a correctional institution. If we continue to rely on the current restrictions regarding criminal history and occupational licensing as cumbersome as they are, we cannot envision a true shift in this narrative.

Employment is the tip of the iceberg pertaining to barriers that individuals with criminal histories face. In Detroit, we face a massive crisis around housing, transportation, substance abuse, and much more for returning citizens. Reevaluating access to employment is at the forefront, but the conversations must continue regarding pathways to housing and other quality-of-life needs for returning citizens.

As a returning citizen, an entrepreneur, a recovering addict, and the Founder of a multimillion dollar for-impact company, my team and I fully endorse the package of bills before you today. Returning citizens have a wide range of skills and abilities, and they should not be overlooked. I hope that the honorable members of the House and Senate will indeed pass these bills for review by Governor Whitmer.

Thank you for your time this morning.