Testimony of Douglas E. Stites, CEO, Capital Area Michigan Works!, Lansing, MI to the Judiciary Standing Committee, Rep. Paul Condino, Chair, in support of HB 4525, HB 4526, HB 4527, and HB 4528, March 28, 2007.

Capital Area Michigan Works! is an original partner in the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI)and has worked with many returning prisoners in an effort to help them connect to jobs, housing and needed services in the community. The goal is to reduce the number of new crimes and new crime victims, and to reduce the recidivism rate for ex-prisoners in Michigan.

A recent parolee, Shawn, is an example of the problem with legal identification for ex-prisoners. Shawn had a job offer open to him upon his release, but no state ID, and no money in his pocket. He was unable to take the job. Shawn was able to obtain his ID almost two weeks after his release with MPRI help. In fact, Shawn represents a 'best case' scenario, in that all the pieces needed to obtain his ID were available in Ingham County. For those many ex-prisoners who were born, went to school or had children elsewhere, the delay is weeks longer.

Legal identification is required for anyone to get a job, apply for federal benefit programs, participate in federal jobs programs, rent an apartment, enroll in school, apply for financial aid, cash a check and open a bank

account. An ex-prisoner is barred from the above activities until he or she can obtain legal identification.

Reasonable people agree that an ex-prisoner who is barred from getting a job, a place to live, job training and education presents a greater threat to public safety. A known felon who is required to live dependent on others for mere subsistence is a ticking time-bomb. Thousands of felons rejoin the community every year. They do not just go away. Many will find a way to survive by committing new crimes, creating new victims. The more obstacles and stress they face, the more likely they are to explode.

It is difficult enough for law enforcement and the judicial system to make Michigan a safer place to live and do business, without the State setting up obstacles for felons to live a law-abiding life. The failure of the State of Michigan to correct the problem of legal identification for ex-prisoners needs to be fixed.

The solution must include what is reasonable. Is it reasonable to think that an ex-prisoner will have items such as a valid school ID, a paycheck or stub with the name and address of the employer, a utility bill in their name, a bank statement showing recent activity, an insurance policy, a mortgage, or tax assessments? Residency verification from a parole agent is reasonable. Copying

how other States have coped with this problem is reasonable.

The solution will address only a part of a much greater crime problem, however, it is a part that the State has control of. Fixing the identification problem will allow prisoner reentry resources to be used more effectively.

The solution must be now. People are being ripped off, hurt and killed while the State of Michigan delays fixing this problem.