Mr/Madame Chair and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is _____, and I am here representing Michigan Citizens for Justice in support of Senate Bill 98. Our organization believes very strongly in the judicial process, and in maintaining the integrity of our court system here in Michigan. (REFERENCE HANDOUTS)**

Senate Bill 98 is a common-sense piece of legislation that would compensate individuals who have been wrongfully convicted of a crime by the state.

What is the most basic responsibilities of government? I would argue that it is to protect the God-given rights of all people, and to punish those who violate the rights of others. When considering this topic, this is an egregious example of government violating the very thing that it is their responsibility to protect – an individual's right to justice.

Many of you have probably heard of the case of Donya Davis, who was convicted in 2007 of car jacking, armed robbery and rape -- crimes he insisted he didn't commit. He was sentenced to 67 years in prison. And in 2014 -- seven years into his sentence -- post-conviction DNA evidence was obtained that supported his innocence.

Three months after that evidence was presented to the Wayne County prosecutor's office, Davis was released from prison. Five months after that, the charges against him were dismissed based on insufficient evidence. This is just one example where an individual was exonerated after being imprisoned for a crime they didn't commit.

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, the average of years lost per wrongfully convicted person in Michigan since 1989 is 8.6 years (see handout). During the course of those years, many of the exonerated missed out on educational and workforce development opportunities. They return to their communities feeling out of step, often unable to meet even basic professional expectations. They are often coping with seriously debilitating insecurities and a persistent feeling of "what might have been" in their professional lives.

While Senate Bill 98 will bring the state in line with the federal compensation standard, it is a rather conservative approach to compensation when compared with other states across the country. Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia all have compensation statutes that vary in terms of eligibility requirements, amount

of annual compensation, and lifetime limits. The median compensation for an individual per year served nationwide (including through statutory compensation, private bills, and civil suits) is approximately $80,000. Many states offer compensation of $50,000 per year or more, including Colorado and Texas, which offer $70,000 per year and $80,000 per year, respectively, in addition to other compensation such as attorneys' fees, healthcare, child support, education costs, and other relief. Therefore, the up to $60,000 yearly stipend with the addition of economic damages and reasonable attorney fees for all individuals who have been wrongly convicted will limit the amount of money the state will have to expend, yet still provide a decent income for those who have had their liberty taken away and their lives shattered.

In conclusion, stakeholders from all corners of the criminal justice system — from advocates to police to prosecutors — agree that the wrongly convicted deserve to be compensated for their lost years. The victims of criminal justice system error deserve strong support from the government that harmed them — however inadvertently — to return them to where they could have been in life but for their wrongful conviction, and to compensate them for the horror they endured.

For these reasons, the Michigan Citizens for Justice would strongly encourage a YES vote on Senate Bill 98 to help the wrongly convicted better transition from prison life to mainstream society.

Thank you, and I would be open to any questions at this time.


**HANDOUTS:

http://time.com/wrongly-convicted/

http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/Exonerations-in-the-United-States-Map.aspx (filter specific to Michigan etc.)