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**STATEMENT OF ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF MASSACHUSETTS BEFORE SENATE CHAIR CYNTHIA STONE CREEM AND HOUSE CHAIR EUGENE L. O'FLAHERTY, AND THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY IN SUPPORT OF S. 1595, AN ACT TO ENHANCING THE CRIMINAL OFFENDER REGISTER INFORMATION SYSTEM.**

Good afternoon, I am Bradley A. MacDougall, Associate Vice President of Government Affairs for Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), the state's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan association of Massachusetts' employers. With more than 6,500 members who employ nearly one out of every five workers in Massachusetts, AIM's mission is to promote the well-being of its members and the prosperity of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by improving the economic climate, proactively advocating fair and equitable public policy, and providing relevant, reliable information and excellent services.

AIM urges members of the committee to give S. 1595 a favorable report. The bill would address the underlying problems with the Commonwealth's Criminal Offender Register Information system and would ensure the accuracy and the timely delivery of CORI information to employers.

AIM shares the Governor's goals of reducing recidivism and increasing employment opportunities in the commonwealth. AIM and Massachusetts employers have historically supported the premise that ex-offenders deserve an opportunity in the area of employment. AIM believes that the CORI Reform agenda should focused on improving the accuracy of the information and creating a positive business climate to create jobs and opportunity.

A transparent and reliable CORI system is a necessary and vital tool that should provide employers with the most reliable information to perform due diligence on job applicants and employees. Additionally, this type of system helps to ensure public safety for all co-workers, clients, employers and state agencies which benefit from accurate and timely background information throughout the screening, interviewing, and hiring of prospective and current employees.

AIM appreciates the leadership of Senator Scott Brown for filing this legislation, which is part of AIM's 2009-2010 legislative agenda.

AIM's CORI reform legislation contains the following provisions:

- Ensuring the absolute accuracy of Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI)
- Provide employers with an affirmative defense against liability when using CORI

- Upgrading the database systems and technical upgrades necessary to ensure timely access of CORI information and processes to validate and provide for the correction of inaccurate data
- Upgrade database system and to allow for national background searches tied to fingerprinting.
- Increasing training programs for employers and state agencies that access, are responsible for the data entry, have custody or utilize CORI
- Ensure that workforce development and re-entry programs include soft skills and technical skills for ex-offenders to have an optimum opportunity to fill vacant positions in the Commonwealth.
- Increasing the membership of the criminal history system's board to include actual system users as well as representatives with workforce training experience.

Two years ago, Governor Patrick's initial CORI reform proposal caused much criticism from employers concerned about their ability to maintain the safety of customers and employees in the workplace. Since that time, we have engaged with hundreds of AIM members and the administration. We hosted a roundtable discussion with the administration and several AIM members to communicate the employer community's concerns with the Governor's CORI reform agenda.

A 2009 report by State Auditor Joseph DeNucci detailed serious concerns with the overall CORI system's accuracy and effectiveness. The report found serious flaws throughout the state criminal records system. Specifically, the audit found that criminal records were not always updated to reflect felony convictions, such as murder or failure to register as a sex offender among many other issues.

Most recently, due to budget cuts, the Criminal Offender Register Information (CORI) system announced that criminal background checks may take up to six weeks to process. This delay is a deterrent to both employer and job seekers in a difficult economy.

AIM and its members believe that public safety is furthered by a transparent and accurate system. AIM believes that the state should not promulgate laws or regulations that further restrict access or application of CORI by employers. AIM members believe that a transparent and accurate system is paramount to furthering our shared goal of reducing recidivism and providing employment opportunities.

AIM believes that employers are fully capable of balancing risk and therefore must have the ability to make hiring decisions unencumbered by overreaching and burdensome laws and regulations. The Criminal Offender Register Information system is designed to allow employers access to critical information about a job candidate's criminal record and history.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and would be happy to answer questions of the Committee Members.