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Wellman Hill Grant Reflection

Summer 2025

Thanks to the generous support of the Wellman Hill Grant, I was able to continue my work this summer at Towards Employment (TE), a workforce development nonprofit in Cleveland, Ohio. TE's mission is to break down the many barriers to employment Clevelanders face, from housing and access to justice, to childcare and transportation. As the Policy Associate, I was given the opportunity to work at the intersection of policy, advocacy, and lived experience. This has been the most impactful professional experience I've had so far in my career.

A significant portion of my work focused on supporting policies for justice-impacted individuals; this often meant interviewing people facing real policy challenges. One woman shared her difficult experience with the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, while another spoke about entering the manufacturing field only two months after leaving prison. These conversations reminded me that policy isn't abstract, it shapes daily life. One thing that I'll carry with me throughout my career is that listening to directly impacted people is essential for creating change that actually helps people.

One of my major projects was the Drive to Justice campaign, which focuses on implementing House Bill 29 – ending many debt-related driver's license suspensions. Last summer, I worked to help pass this bill; this summer I was able to engage with the critical process of implementation. I organized community information sessions, tabled at neighborhood events, spoke to directly-impacted people, and worked with journalists to make sure Ohioans understood how the law could benefit them. This experience showed me that passing a bill is just the beginning, and lasting change requires ongoing community education and advocacy.

Beyond HB29, I contributed to other policy initiatives including housing justice, addressing the “benefit cliff”, and advancing the Ability to Pay program, which aims to lower court fees and fines for low-income individuals. I also had the opportunity to interact directly with elective officials – learning about their legislative priorities, and ensuring that TE’s mission was represented at the state level.

My work extended into communications as well. Over my time at TE, I’ve written four Policy Pulse newsletters and produced four episodes of Real-Time Takes, a blog-cast where I interview directly impacted individuals to spotlight their struggles and highlight how policy can better support them. These projects taught me how to translate policy issues into engaging stories. You can check out my work at [TowardsEmployment.org/policy-advocacy/](https://TowardsEmployment.org/policy-advocacy/)

Looking ahead, I am thrilled to continue at Towards Employment this fall, where I will not only build on these projects but also train as a public documenter, further expanding my ability to connect community stories to systemic reform.

Overall, my experience at TE has been transformative. I have grown as a policy advocate, a communicator, and a leader. Most importantly, I have learned that meaningful policy work requires persistence, collaboration, and a commitment to the communities most affected. I am so thankful for the Wellman Hill Grant program which made this opportunity possible. It has allowed me the flexibility to pursue what I love and given me the confidence and tools to make a contribution to public service in my career ahead.