



OHIO COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS ASSOCIATION
TESTIMONY
PRESENTED TO THE
SENATE JUDICIARY – CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

By: Debra D. Buccilla
Representing OCCA

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Good morning Chairman Grendell and members of the Senate Judiciary Criminal Justice Committee. I am Debra Buccilla, Executive Vice President and COO of Alvis House, a private nonprofit human services agency with facilities in Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Lima and Chillicothe. I am also Secretary of the Ohio Community Corrections Association (OCCA), the organization I am testifying on behalf of today. OCCA represents 24 Halfway Houses and 3 Community-Based Correctional Facilities (CBCFs) across Ohio.

Thank you for your continued support of community corrections in the State of Ohio and the opportunity to testify before you on Senate Bill 22; and a special thank you to the bill's sponsor, Senator Seitz, for his support. I would also like to thank Chairman Grendell and the Senate for committing their support to this important legislation.

Halfway Houses and Community Based Correctional Facilities (CBCFs) are located throughout the state. Whether or not our facilities are located in your districts, let me assure you that individuals returning from prison are in your communities. According to a study completed by the Pew Charitable Trusts this spring, one out of every 25 adults in Ohio is under correctional supervision today, compared to one in 116 in 1982. Ohio ranks 6th in the nation for criminally involved citizens.

Ohio's prison population exceeds 50,000 inmates in a system designed to hold 38,320. 57% of offenders sentenced to prison in Ohio are serving less than a year. Among women, 76% are released within 12 months and 49% leave prison within six months. The prison system is not designed to provide rehabilitative/treatment to individuals who are only there a relatively short time.

More than 28,000 offenders are released annually to Ohio's communities, meaning that the way in which they return home is critical to ensuring public safety, reduced victimization, cost containment, and prison management.

Senate Bill 22 provides research-based solutions to reduce barriers and make our communities whole, while at the same time upholding a high standard of fiscal accountability. We all benefit when former offenders have the tools to support their families and become contributing, tax-paying citizens. That means changing the way we deal with some offenders and also investing in treatment, jobs, education, and housing.

Senate Bill 22 includes the following provisions that stand to benefit all Ohioans:

- Senate Bill 22 requires courts to consider community sanctions for felony non-support as opposed to incarceration. This results in revenue that will be paid directly to children and families and in earned, taxable income generated by offenders, as opposed the current structure in which these individuals are supported by tax payers in a jail or prison and not able to fulfill any of their child support obligations
- This bill creates a presumption against a prison term for low level drug offenders in favor of more effective means of addressing low level felons in the community. Individuals in community corrections programs contribute to society in ways that institutional inmates cannot. As you can see in the attached "The Best Investment for Ohio's Future," you will find detail about the income, restitution, child support and more that community corrections clients were accountable for in 2008.

- For those serving a prison sentence that includes non-mandatory prison term(s), Senate Bill 22 allows those persons to be eligible for judicial release. These individuals can become employed, contributing citizens while still being monitored in a community setting at a lower cost than incarceration.
- This bill authorizes intervention for drug users in lieu of conviction for those convicted of theft or non-support where substance abuse, mental retardation or mental illness contributed to the crime and provides for an intervention plan by a psychiatrist, psychologist or licensed social worker and proof that the plan was followed prior to dismissal proceedings. This provides an important resource to help stop individuals with mental health and other treatment needs from becoming caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system.
- Senate Bill 22 expands the usage of community control sanctions and allows the Adult Parole Authority to purchase electronic monitoring supervision from residential community corrections' providers.
- Because 80% of the individuals in prison have substance abuse issues, Senate Bill 22 requires a cooperative effort between the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services in pursuing federal dollars for these dually affected constituents. This will help to provide coordinated services.

At a time when Ohio must spend every taxpayer dollar with special care, the sentencing changes suggested by Senate Bill 22 offer appropriate sanctions at a lower cost than incarceration. Additionally, the services provided by community corrections programs have been proven to significantly reduce the chance of the offender creating future victims and returning to the criminal justice system.

Finally, the members of OCCA are aware of the prison overcrowding issues and have been working with the key stakeholders to find solutions to this issue. We fully support the idea of bringing the Council of State Government (CSG) to evaluate Ohio's sentencing practices and prison overcrowding problems, however, Ohio should not wait for lengthy deliberations on our current penal system to make changes. We believe that many of the problems inherent in our current system can be rectified by implementing the strong, common sense reforms contained in Senate Bill 22.

OCCA is happy to lend its support to the many critical reentry components contained in SB 22. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Additional questions may be directed to:

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