



Proponent Written Testimony Submitted to the House Criminal Justice Committee

Senate Bill 66 (Eklund / Tavares)

Submitted by: Jimmy and Dee Haslam – Owners, Cleveland Browns

April 10, 2018

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and other members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

On behalf of the Cleveland Browns, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 66. While the Cleveland Browns may not immediately come to mind in the context of criminal justice reform, this area has become important to us on both an organizational and a personal level.

As many of you are likely aware, NFL players across our league have been advocating and working to raise awareness for various social justice causes in recent years. Last year, a group of players formed the Players Coalition, a formal organization dedicated to making progress in three key areas: 1) Criminal Justice Reform, 2) Police / Community Relations, and 3) Education / Economic Advancement. Subsequently, the NFL and its member clubs (including the Browns) worked with the Players Coalition to form a joint player-ownership committee focusing on social justice issues. We are one of five teams with ownership representation on this committee, and are committed to supporting our players in their efforts to bring about positive change in the community.

In furtherance of this goal, we have been working to learn as much as we can about the landscape for criminal justice reform in Ohio. Through our research, we have identified Senate Bill 66 as a responsible, bipartisan piece of legislation featuring a number of “common sense” criminal justice reforms. In our view, these reforms will be positive for our state, which currently has a prison population that is much larger than its prison system was designed for.

Specifically, we support the bill’s addition of rehabilitation to the overriding purposes of felony sentencing in the existing law. The two purposes currently listed, protecting the public and punishing the offender, of course remain critical, but we feel that adding rehabilitation is an important and necessary change. For it is through rehabilitation that recidivism can be reduced, which will benefit Ohio as a whole.

We also support the greater discretion that Senate Bill 66 affords judges in sentencing certain low-level, non-violent offenders, and specifically the ability for judges to impose a combination of community control sanctions designed to enhance the likelihood of rehabilitation and integration.

Additionally, given the severity of the Ohio opioid epidemic, another positive change under the bill is the expansion of treatment availability through Intervention in Lieu of Conviction (ILC) for low-level, non-violent offenders suffering from addiction. The bill removes the requirement that participants must not have been previously treated for drug abuse, and also gives judges greater latitude to keep participants in the program when appropriate. These modifications increase the likelihood that non-violent addicts can successfully turn their lives around and avoid the negative consequences of a criminal conviction.

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Finally, we agree with the bill's proposed changes reducing prison terms for mere technical post-release violations and expanding eligibility for record sealing in certain cases of low-level, non-violent offenders. Simply put, our economy needs more workers, and these revisions, particularly with respect to record sealing, will better position returning citizens to re-enter the labor force and contribute to the Ohio economy and society generally.

In conclusion, one of our main organizational pillars at the Browns is to give back to our wonderful community. In our minds, it is imperative for us to serve as advocates for Northeast Ohio, while also supporting and encouraging our players to use their unique platform and experiences to make a positive impact on society. By supporting Senate Bill 66, we feel we are doing just that. We respectfully recommend that the committee support this important legislation, and we thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this discussion.