



**State Representative Emilia Sykes  
State Representative Thomas E. West  
Sponsor Testimony (As Prepared) – House Bill 555**

**West**

Good Morning Chairman Manning, Vice Chair XXXX, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony this afternoon on House Bill 555, legislation that creates a process for which an offender can seek a modification to his/her penalty or punishment if a penalty for a crime is later reduced by legislation. This bill largely seeks to reduce incarceration rates in Ohio and to ultimately save the state tax dollars.

We are all aware that action is needed to address overpopulation in our prisons and prioritize treatment and rehabilitation instead of incarceration. According to the Columbus Dispatch, Ohio currently incarcerates almost 51,000 men and women in 32 prisons designed, collectively, to hold about 38,000 people. The average cost of incarcerating one person each day is an average of \$67.84. This means we are spending about \$1.3 billion each year on incarcerating Ohioans. The only way to significantly reduce this dangerous overcrowding is through sentencing reform that lowers the number of people sent to prison each year and shortens the average length of stay. Our legislation is a critical piece of sentencing reform that we must undertake.

Our bill does not apply to violent offenses. There is an application process and court proceeding that must take place in order for an offender to get a reduced punishment. As we find strategic and coordinated ways to alleviate the opioid epidemic that has plagued our communities, we will need to continue updating and reforming our criminal justice system so that rehabilitation is priority over incarceration. It would make little sense to update our state laws relating to drug charges and other nonviolent offenses and not pass a bill such as House Bill 555. That way more Ohioans can have the opportunity to be present for their families and be productive members of society, instead of being locked in cages for years. Thank you for allowing us to speak about this important bill.

## Sykes

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing Representative West and me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 555. As Representative West mentioned, the opiate crisis, mental health treatment, and prison overpopulation are all interconnected criminal justice issues that are costing the state billions.

Ohio is in dire need of criminal justice reform to not only save tax dollars, but restore justice to citizens and our communities. According to the Council of State Governments' Analysis of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, nonviolent, drug and property offenses constitute nearly 60 percent of all felony sentences. Issue 1, a citizen prompted ballot initiative, failed to pass, and now 700,000 Ohioans who signed the petition and those who voted against Issue 1, look to us, the General Assembly, to enact criminal justice reform. With a bipartisan team of local leaders and our leaders here in the Statehouse vowing to implement sentencing reform, we will need a remedy for those currently incarcerated to take part in the proposed changes.

In our society the punishment must match the crime. House Bill 555 provides a process for updating the punishment to the crime. If the statute of the offense changes, the penalty must also change. The year, month, or even in some cases, the day a person is sentenced should not have them sitting behind bars longer than what the law requires. With the passage of this legislation, it is our chance to show our constituents, the General Assembly does care about criminal justice reform and will implement proactive criminal justice policy. Thank you for your time, we will be happy to take any questions the committee may have.