

OHIO PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION

196 EAST STATE STREET • SUITE 200 • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215

TELEPHONE 614/221-1266 • FAX 614/221-0753 • WWW.OHIOPA.ORG

John E. Murphy
Executive Director

HB-49; Budget Bill
Interested Party Testimony
March 22, 2017
Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

Our association opposes the provision in the budget bill that would preclude sentencing a fifth degree felon to prison for less than twelve months, except for an offense of violence, a sex offense, an offense requiring a mandatory term, or if the person has a conviction for a prior felony of violence or any felony sex offense.

First, while this change would no doubt have a budgetary impact, this is a substantive change in criminal sentencing law and should not part of a budget bill.

Second, the legislature should not tie the court's hands in this way. It is almost unheard of for a court to sentence a fifth degree felon to prison without first trying some other sanction. When the defendant repeatedly fails on community control, which is common, the court has to have the prison option available. It doesn't help respect for the court to try one community sanction after another and have no prison option to encourage compliance by the defendant. If this were to pass, the defendant could in effect ignore the judge, knowing that the court does not have the prison option. We understand DRC's frustration, but sometimes the court has no alternative.

This might actually induce the judge to impose longer sentences in order to build in some time before reaching the 12 months remaining. And it could encourage the judge to give up on the defendant sooner rather than trying another community control sanction, thus increasing the prison population.

We agree that many offenses now categorized as fifth degree felonies should be misdemeanors. We have routinely opposed increasing the penalty for some of these offenses. But now that they are on the books, we must not take from the court the authority to deal with them effectively.