

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, and the Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this committee on behalf of Senate Bill 66, "Modify Criminal Sentencing and Corrections Law." I would like to speak in favor of this bill and share how this bill will directly help me and those that I serve.

My name is Harry Cox. I was brought up in what is known today as a dysfunctional family. I am the youngest of my four siblings. I graduated high school with a 3.8 GPA, completed 10 years of active duty in the military and worked for the department of labor and defense until I fell away from God's grace into a world of sin. During this dark time in my life I also battled with addiction and was incarcerated.

In my last incarceration, I enrolled in the Oasis Program. This program took a therapeutic approach to rehab and focused on my behavior. I started in the program as an enrollee and ended up as the Senior Coordinator answering directly to the warden. I then entered a re-entry program through the Bell Center and was again treated using a similar therapeutic approach. Again, I went from mentee to mentor. These programs helped me cultivate my short and long term goals and helped me intertwine them into a vision for my success. Through my trials and tribulations God's love and grace taught me great empathy, compassion, and resiliency. I can stand firmly on my purpose now and I know what I want out of life. I want all people who are struggling with addiction and criminal thinking to have the chance to make this change.

When I was released it was a very difficult time for me. My record made finding housing and work hard. Despite my leadership inside the prison and the work I had done to better myself and get clean, I found that society viewed me through my record. I struggled with homelessness for a period of time and also barriers to sustainable employment before making my way forward.

I have worked hard and developed a pro social lifestyle. I am the first person in my family to graduate from college. I graduated from Columbus State Community College with a degree in Mental Health, Addiction, and Disability, Associate Program (Social Work) with 3.694 G.P.A and as a member of the PHI Theta Kappa Honor Society (10 May 2013). I received my Bachelor Degree in Substance Abuse Counseling with a 4.00 GPA and graduated as a member of the Pinnacle Honor Society. I was selected to represent my class as the Honor Graduate for the College of Adult and Graduate Studies. I recently completed my long term goal earning a Master degree in Spiritual Counseling with a 4.00 GPA.

I use my degree and experience to work with recently released and incarcerated individuals. In my work, I facilitate anger management, social skills, social decision making, and AOD groups every day as a Cognitive Behavior Specialist at a local reentry organization in Columbus. I also mentor first generation students at Columbus State Community College, through the TRIO program. I've conducted expungement seminars in joined in partnership with other nonprofits like Impact Community Action and St. Vincent de Paul to help individuals overcome barriers, including employment and housing. I lead an outreach ministry that develops low income leaders with disabilities and together we provide food to families in need. I conduct meetings at several churches with the South of Main Coalition to help

communities. South of Main Coalition has helped organize block watches, acquire security cameras, stop the sale of liquor in high risk neighborhoods, build community gardens, and clean up the neighborhoods and is a valuable organization known to assist with the Stop the Violence Campaign on the lower east side. Moreover, I assisted in developing the Seal Program for the city of Columbus Ohio.

I have come to the understanding of what sincere success feels and looks like and know what it takes to be a man, a student, a Christian living out my faith in the service of others, and a productive citizen in today's society. Despite all of this, I still have multiple felony F5s on my record. In the past, I attempted to get my record expunged and I presented all this evidence of my life. This is evidence I believe shows that I am rehabilitated and doing all that has been required of me and more. But the changes in recent laws to increase record sealing and expungement options, like SB 337, did not apply to my situation due to the year that my criminal record dates back to. Some of my felonies fall under the new law and some of these were charges under the old law, but were dismissed in order to convict me under the new law when I committed a crime while on probation. This complicates my situation and makes the clearing of my record – as I understand it - impossible under SB337 as well as under SB66, because it only applies to the new law.

Even though I have achieved so much success in my life I still cannot grasp or answer these questions: Why am I still paying? Why are we still paying? When will we be able to stop paying? This drives my passion to come before you today. We need increased options for our records to be cleared when we do the right thing and change our lives. I want to be able to be part of making this happen to help my situation and to help others like me.

Expanding the opportunities for treatment in the community and record sealing and expungement will improve reentry for thousands. It will improve opportunities for employment and housing not based off past mistakes, but on the new character and lives we have created for ourselves. These changes will allow for individuals like myself the golden opportunity to have social stigmas and ongoing oppressions lifted due to felony convictions. I hope you can hear this call to justice for convicted felons who have proven themselves worthy of having their records sealed and/or expunged.

Thank you for your time in regard to this matter.

Harry Cox