

Members of the Committee: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sonia Matis. I'm a sexual assault survivor and a volunteer in women's prisons and at a rape crisis center.

I have been on the front lines as I've seen the population of our women's prisons explode as lives get ruined and families get torn apart. There are over 4,000 women in Ohio prisons now – the fastest growing population in the state. The vast majority of women are in prison for non-violent drug and property offenses. This is true across the state and especially true in rural counties. Opiates are the primary driver of this crisis.

From my own work in women's prisons and rape crisis centers, I can tell you that many of the women have faced untreated trauma or were the victim of a crime that has led them toward drug abuse, risky behavior and the justice system. These women need our support. They need treatment and counseling, not to be sent to prison to become hardened criminals in state prison.

That's what makes this Senate legislation so important. This legislation recognizes that treating individuals at the local level is more impactful and costs less than state prison. Importantly, passing this legislation will increase opportunities for the kind of women I've seen so often in prison – low-level, drug addicted – to get the treatment they need to get out of a cycle of crime and change their lives.

This bill gives judges the opportunity to have more discretion so more women and other low level offenders get local treatment and get past their addiction. It keeps Ohioans out of prison for minor, technical violations. Doing so not only keeps costs lower, but is more likely to actually rehabilitate a low-level offender.

And this bill sends the powerful message that criminal justice in Ohio is not just about punishment, it is also about rehabilitation.

This is also in line with the desires of crime survivors as well. Studies of crime survivors by the Alliance for Safety and Justice found that crime survivors favor shorter prison sentences and greater investment on prevention and rehabilitation. Crime survivors know that the way to end the crime and drug crisis is through investment in education, mental health and drug treatment and job training. Working on the front lines, I can tell you that they are correct.

Our state has too many women in prison who shouldn't be there. Women who turned to drugs as an escape or who were forced into committing criminal offenses. It's been my mission to help and support these women. This legislation will do the same.

Thank you.