

TO: Ohio Senate Finance-Corrections Subcommittee, Joe Uecker, Chair
FROM: C. Joseph Sprague, President of the Horizon Prison Initiative
DATE: May 21, 2015
RE: Proponent for amendment of support

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

I am C. Joseph Sprague, a Bishop [ret.] of the United Methodist Church, now serving as volunteer President of the bi-partisan, multi-disciplinary, multi-faith, multi-racial Board of Directors of the Horizon Prison Initiative. It is in this latter role that I address you.

In two weeks, Horizon will graduate its 15th class of inmates from MCI, its 5th class from CCI, and its 3rd class from LoCI. These proud graduates will become part of some one thousand transformed Horizon inmates who continue to play a leadership role in transforming other inmates and these three penal institutions as is vividly clear to all with even minimal knowledge of the changed culture of MCI and the changing face of the other two institutions. Horizon has become leaven in the institutional prison loaf. Therefore, in the last five years less than 4% of Horizon graduates released from prison have returned and Horizon's recidivism rate across its fifteen years of activity is less than 10%. The ODRC named Horizon "best practices" in a 2013 report. Battelle did an economic impact study of the Horizon program recently and this nationally esteemed research giant estimated that Horizon saves the taxpayers of Ohio \$5M per year.

For 15 years, Horizon has been a gift of the multi-faith religious community to you, Ohio tax-payers, ODRC, as past and present wardens attest, and, most especially, the many inmates whose lives have been demonstrably transformed. All of this and more have been accomplished through a comprehensive academic, highly relational and experiential, spiritually and psychologically informed program of life re-orientation aided by the generosity of 200 volunteers each year, who are at the heart of Horizon. Many of these volunteers, from various faith traditions, are Outside Brothers, who meet weekly across the academic year with their Inside Brothers to build trusted interpersonal relationships. Something most of the inmates openly confess they have never had with another male.

Cost efficient, as the program costs but \$1,600.00 per inmate per year, in large measure due to a 25:1 volunteer to staff ratio and a small dedicated

program staff that works for a mere financial pittance because each staff member is there due to a sense of call, Horizon is not only highly effective, but simultaneously economically prudent. Any wag or wonk would find it impossible to offer an alternative program that is both as effective and cost efficient as Horizon. Thus, I have no reticence in asking you to cooperate with Horizon in funding this emerging national model for innovation, fiscal conservatism, and results-driven effectiveness.

The Horizon program is neither "jail-house" religion nor an irrelevant con-game played for a certificate of supposed accomplishment. Rather, what is experienced through Horizon's core curriculum of community building, conflict resolution, personal awakening, trauma workshops, cognitive learning styles, family letter writing and reconciliation, victim awareness, multi-faith respect, faith specific spiritual growth, Inside/Outside Brothers, and more must be integrated within the inmate's life and demonstrated daily. It must become obvious in his behavior among peers in his 6-member family unit, with the whole Horizon dorm, across the entire prison, with his family of origin, and, if possible, with victims, as well. Through Horizon, inmates are coached and expected to change in order to live transformed lives, both within and without prison. Horizon is an experiential, proven, multi-faith boot camp that takes tough forsaken men off of the human dung heap of prison life and transforms them into the men they can become. They then become agents of tangible transformation, both within and without the prison environment.

12 years ago a former leader of the Aryan Brotherhood in Ohio prisons, a lifer who remains a widely respected Horizon leader inside the walls today, stood beside a tough Black Muslim inmate from the streets and said to 50 bishops gathered at MCI from around the globe to learn about this transformational program, " I used to have his number, but now, I have his back. While we are very different in color, experience, religion and beliefs, we have learned that each of us is home to a soul, an essence, that is sacred. We are not garbage. He is my brother. No one gets to him unless he comes through me." This is an example of the kind of tangible ACTUAL transformation our prisons, broken urban neighborhoods, and a violence-prone world desperately need.

Until July, 2013, Horizon's too skimpy budget of \$250K for the three programs at MCI, CCI, and LoCI, serving almost 200 men per year, was

jointly underwritten by the private sector, including individuals, congregations and foundations, and contributions from the I & E funds in the three participating prisons. Horizon also received periodic special gifts from Board members to remain solvent. However, in May, 2013, after ODRC named us "best practices", the support from I & E funds was curtailed. Without due notice, in six short weeks, we had to raise the entire budget. Fortunately, at that dire moment, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine's office stepped forward with grants from civil litigation funds to help pay Horizon staff, computerize our three Horizon dormitories, and make it possible for Horizon to enter fiscal 2015-'16 with a minimal, and yet balanced budget. Mike DeWine had experienced the Horizon program at LoCI, "up close and very personal", and became the ardent supporter he is today.

Currently, ORW in Marysville is clamoring for Horizon to come there to take-over its failing faith-based dorm for 125 women. London has urged us to do the same this summer with its admittedly flawed faith-based dorm for 110 men. While we want to comply in both cases and could readily do so, if we had adequate financial resources, truth be told Horizon simply does not have the funds to render these requested and needed services. We have not filled recent staff vacancies and current staff receives no benefits and has received no increase in compensation for several years. The Program Coordinator at London voluntarily works for 50% [\$20K] of his salary. We simply cannot continue to provide proven, effective "best practices", let alone expand to ORW and the entire faith-based dorm at London, without sufficient financial support from the State of Ohio. We are a community partner that has collaborated faithfully with the state. We have delivered a "best practices" program for years. Now, Horizon simply must receive minimal financial support or we will be ethically and financially mandated to say NO to the ORW and London requests for expansion, while immediately and quite tragically reducing our programs from 3 to 2 male prisons beginning July 1, 2015.

While Horizon did not seek a place in the ODRC line item budget for fear we would stimulate unhealthy competition among "contractors", we did meet with Director Gary Mohr, Deputy Norm Robinson and other top ODRC staff on March 12th. Again, we received accolades for the Horizon programs, along with the promise of quantifiable data on Horizon's obvious effectiveness. All ODRC staff present expressed their unqualified support

for this particular appeal to you for the Legislature's inclusion of Horizon in the state biennial budget as a line-item amendment.

Such a \$250K per annum amendment would allow Horizon to expand to ORW to serve incarcerated Ohio women, the fastest growing prison population in our state, stay at MCI and CCI, as we are, expand the program at LoCI to take responsibility for the entire faith-based dorm, while filling staff vacancies and paying our small staff a living wage with needed benefits..

Given the plethora of current news regarding the crisis in criminal justice in this nation, and further given a widely spoken intent on the part of State of Ohio leadership to wed conservative fiscal policy with effective collaborations with the community for the common good in matters such as prison reform, it baffles me why well-intended, bright, and fiscally conservative State of Ohio leaders have not lifted Horizon as a vivid example of what is being done effectively in Ohio that could very well become a viable model for corrections and rehabilitation across this nation, as visitors to our program from across the United States and other nations have opined.

Often, the key to needed systemic innovation is at hand for those with hearts to feel, eyes to see, and purse strings to open in order to make transformation real. Horizon is just such a key, an unique opportunity is in your collective hand to feel, see, and be boldly prudent to fund. May it be so, soon and very soon.

Thank you

Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, President of the Horizon Prison Initiative

May 21, 2015