



TO: Finance - General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee

FROM: Shakyra Diaz, Alliance for Safety and Justice

DATE: May 23, 2017

RE: House Bill 49

To Chair Jordan, Vice Chair O'Brien, and members of the Finance - General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee. My name is Shakyra Diaz, Midwest Regional Director for The Alliance for Safety and Justice, a project of the Tides Center. The Alliance for Safety and Justice is an organization that aims to win new safety priorities across the country. ASJ brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence. I appear before you today to testify in favor of the state budget criminal justice provisions.

There is no more important role of our justice system than promoting public safety. As you consider the state budget it is key to work towards a system that serves the needs of Ohio's communities and makes them safer, meeting the needs of crime victims and preventing the cycle of crime are of the highest importance. Despite this foundational goal, too many of Ohio's criminal justice resources are wasted on ineffective over-incarceration practices instead of stopping cycles of crime and enhancing victim support. There are smart approaches to stop the cycle of crime through a combination of strategies that emphasize rehabilitation, trauma recovery, graduated sanctions, and incarceration when appropriate. The budget provisions are a strong step that will create a safer, more cost effective criminal justice system in Ohio.

The budget proposal wisely emphasizes rehabilitation, treatment and training for non-violent, low-level offenders. It does this by investing over \$100 million in community resources and by diverting non-violent F5 offenders out of state prison. Those who commit F5 offenses often have mental health or drug addiction challenges; the overwhelming majority of them will have short-term sentences and

will quickly return to their communities. They are people who can be treated and rehabilitated in community. Prison is not the right place for people have been convicted of F5 offences as this alone, undermines public safety.

They also represent nearly 22 percent of Ohioans sent to prison in 2015 or about 22 percent of those sentenced. Not only will this provide budget savings for the state, but it will result in a safer state by rehabilitating low level offenders instead of sending them to state prison. Too often in debates about the state budget proposed reforms are characterized in a us vs. them, state prisons vs. local jails, the truth of that matter is that this is about supporting successful rehabilitation and enhancing safety. The most recent data indicates that Ohio has now surpassed New York and Georgia's prison population. Ohio has the 4th largest prison population overall and the 4th largest female prison population in the nation, this while struggling to bring drug treatment to scale in the opioid crisis. We need to acknowledge, that we must take a new approach. We cannot afford to delay the bold reforms Ohio needs. The proposed reforms should not be characterized in a us vs. them manner as they center community control, treatment, and rehabilitation which will benefit all of us.

This approach aligns with what crime survivors want from the criminal justice. The Alliance for Safety and Justice conducted the first nation survey of victim's views in the country. Victims indicated that they prefer the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitation than punishment by a margin of 2 to 1. By a margin of 3 to 1 crime victims shared the belief that time in prison make people more likely to commit another crime rather than less likely.

Local safety solutions that hold people accountable through rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community supervision, or community service are preferable over prison. This budget accomplishes those goals.

A balanced approach to public safety will allow law enforcement and incarceration resources to be focused on serious crime, while more resources go towards prevention and rehabilitation to make our collective communities safer.

If the Alliance for Safety and Justice can be of further assistance please do let us know as we expect to be a resource to you.