



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

Senate Judiciary Committee

Paul Pfeifer

Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 341

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am pleased to be able to offer testimony on SB 341. This short bill conveys an extremely important goal for the coming General Assembly; a goal that is no small feat because of the complexity of our current drug laws, the vastness of the opioid crisis, and the multitude of factors that need to be considered at every turn.

Often, the public does not know everything its government does, and the rhetoric around Issue 1 proved that to be the case. Despite claims to the contrary, the legislature has repeatedly worked on important criminal justice reform. The work of the Criminal Recodification Committee, in particular, has not been shelved. Rather, it presents probably one of the best currently available frameworks from which to build a drug reform policy in Ohio.

I applaud the sponsors of this bill, Senator Eklund and Senate President Obhof for committing to drug reform and for doing it in a measured, thoughtful way. The judiciary strongly supports a system that helps rehabilitate people. The judiciary supports a thoughtful approach that considers harshness of a sentence, eligibility for diversion, access to evidence-based treatment, and ability to overcome collateral consequences.

Some of the perceived consensus objectives within the judiciary are:

- 1) To strengthen methods, tools and tactics to interrupt the flow of illegal and dangerous drugs of abuse into our communities.
- 2) To enhance the knowledge, science, training, capacity and quality of treatment for drug addiction across Ohio, especially in communities having limited local addiction services.
- 3) To expand the options for courts to guide addicts into appropriate recovery paths after professional assessment.
- 4) To lower the barriers to employment and housing for addicts that have demonstrated a commitment to winning their daily lifetime struggle to maintain abstinence.

I have included some data with my testimony – it helps underscore how thorny this issue is. Thank you for considering the input of the Ohio Judicial Conference.