



May 19, 2022

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee,

My name is Lauren Krisai, and I'm the senior state policy manager at the Justice Action Network, a national bipartisan organization that advocates for criminal justice reforms at the state and federal levels.

At the Justice Action Network, we advocate for reforms that are evidence-based, proven to enhance public safety, and with strong bipartisan support. That's why I am here to testify in favor of House Bill 315.

Currently, if a dangerous person is accused of committing a violent offense, and a judge determines that the person's pretrial release poses a threat to the community, the only option judges have is to set a high bail amount and hope that the person can't afford to pay it. This means that a person of means—no matter how dangerous they are—can be released if they have the money to pay for it. This is a risk that Ohioans should not have to face, and something that House Bill 315 sets out to correct.

This bill gives judges every tool they need when making individual pretrial determinations: they have the ability to impose cash bail when appropriate, pretrial supervision or conditions of release, or, when warranted, initiate a detention hearing. This allows judges to tailor the appropriate conditions to the individual accused of a crime to better protect public safety. Not all defendants are the same, and not all defendants need the same conditions to ensure their appearance and protect public safety. This bill recognizes that and gives judges the appropriate tools to respond to these individual needs on a case-by-case basis.

This bill also recognizes that individuals who pose little risk to public safety and are accused of low-level offenses should not be held in jail simply for their inability to pay cash bail. When we jail these low-risk individuals simply because a lack of access to cash, it totally disrupts their lives to the point where we see diminishing public safety returns. They may be the primary caretaker for their children, and while in jail they are unable to provide for them. They may have employers who are not understanding if they suddenly disappear for a week or more because they couldn't come up with bail money. And the cost of this to Ohio's taxpayers is extraordinary. Ohio shouldn't be housing these types of individuals in our jails because it makes no one safer, and this bill recognizes that as well. Pretrial detention should be the last resort and reserved for defendants accused of the most serious offenses or who pose a danger to the public.

There are many safeguards included in this bill, and many components of the legislation reflect the comprehensive stakeholder process the bill sponsors have taken on. It represents a positive step forward for Ohio communities and will make Ohio's pretrial system smarter and safer. I urge the committee's support for House Bill 315.

Sincerely,

Lauren Krisai, Justice Action Network