



OHIO COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS ASSOCIATION
TESTIMONY

HB 110

SUBMITTED TO THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

By: Jeremy Simpson
May 18, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am Jeremy Simpson, Chief Operating Officer of Community Corrections Association in Youngstown with over 25 years of experience in this field. Community Corrections Association operates three halfway house facilities, a community-based correctional facility, and non-residential criminal justice programs including being the journalized probation department for the Mahoning County Common Pleas Court. I am also president of the Ohio Community Corrections Association (OCCA) representing 39 nonprofit residential reentry treatment facilities, also called halfway houses, and community based correctional facilities (CBCFs). There are 18 CBCFs in Ohio, OCCA represents five.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to offer written testimony in support of the budget. We applaud the administration's commitment to community corrections and recognition of the important role played in reducing both recidivism and the prison population.

Because of your leadership and that of the Ohio Department of **Rehabilitation** and Correction (ODRC), Ohio has been a national leader in evidence-based community corrections programs. As you can see by the enclosed fact sheet, Ohio Community Correctional Programs; including halfway houses, community based correctional facilities (CBCFs), and Community Corrections Act Programs provide effective correctional and treatment sanctions while assuring accountability and public safety. Through an efficient allocation of taxpayer resources based on sound evidence-based practices, Ohio has made significant steps forward to **reduce costs and improve public safety**. As you may know, the most recent ODRC report on recidivism showed that individuals who successfully completed a halfway house program showed a recidivism rate of just 8.2% after one year; and 18.7% after two years.

We work really hard to restore citizens by teaching: pro-social approaches to problems, job skills, and assumption of responsibility for harm caused to communities as a result of criminal choices. Our clients are much more likely to have mental illness and/or substance use disorders than the general population. In fact, according to the Brennan Report "...79% of today's prisoners suffer from either drug addiction or mental illness, and 40% suffer from both¹." In Ohio, the result is a prison system with ten times as many mentally ill inmates as there are patients in the six psychiatric hospitals in our state.

Our research-based programs address behavioral health issues and are **proven** to reduce recidivism. Clients are able to work and/or attend school while participating in treatment, gathering resources, and learning skills for successful reentry.

PANDEMIC

- During COVID, as the virus surged and declined in Ohio, halfway houses and community based correctional facilities stayed open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to care for clients referred to us by prisons and jails.
- Following a state health orders, our residential community corrections programs changed floor plans for social distancing, implemented telehealth, and purchased PPE for service delivery.
- During all of this, providers maintained their OhioMHAS certifications and conducted treatment groups with smaller numbers of participants, which in some instances meant doubling and tripling the number of sessions.

- **At the height of the pandemic, we continued to pay staff that became infected and staff who were quarantined. Other staff members reported to work – doing double shifts and incurring overtime to relieve staffing shortages.**
- As a means to keep everyone safe, we sent clients to approved home sites, in most cases using GPS monitoring, while our facilities stayed open with lower census numbers inside buildings. We also contracted with hotels and other facilities to provide safe quarantine for any clients who tested positive for COVID-19.
- To meet the new DRC needs, the virtual courts, and local probation departments, even in the midst of a pandemic, we began:
 - Housing offenders released from prisons homeless that had no supervision time remaining on their sentences.
 - Providing in-reach cognitive and life skills tele-services for incarcerated persons.
 - Providing virtual treatment for offenders under the supervision of the Adult Parole Authority.
 - Creating in-service opportunities for the ODRC that would be archived on their electronic platform for all providers.
 - Taking long-term offenders and higher risk releases from high security prisons with longer lengths of stay.
 - Taking additional referrals directly from probation departments and court systems.

FYs 2022-2023 STATE OPERATING BUDGET

We anticipate that as vaccines are deployed, courts open, and referrals ramp up there will be a commensurate increase in the occupancy at our residential facilities. And yet, we will have set a new precedent for the types of clients that we take.

As you know, the prison numbers have decreased as a result of COVID-19. Lower level offenders were sent home and high security offenders remained incarcerated. ODRC advised that they want us to take clients at high risk to re-offend, in need of supervision, with high behavioral health needs. These persons require additional expertise and a cadre of staff that are well trained in trauma informed care, behavioral health, crisis de-escalation, self-defense, etc.

We support the ODRC expansion of allowing more persons to take advantage of the Community Based Substance Use Disorder program by expanding eligibility to felony level threes. Right now, as we take more of these clients, we have a lower and manageable census to effectively handle the higher risk and needs. As our caseload returns to normal, and the numbers grow, we will need additional funding to maintain public safety, appropriate staffing numbers, and increased training for a higher and different staff skill set. We also support the expansion of Treatment Transfer in this budget which will allow more persons with Substance Use Disorders to reenter their communities through a halfway house placement.

OCCA is requesting the restoration of the staff sustainability funding increase approved in the last General Assembly for halfway houses which were foregone as a cost-savings measure during the COVID pandemic. These funds will help with recruitment and retention of specialized staff that we need to care for and treat the more difficult clients in our custody across approximately 40 facilities statewide. ODRC advised that they want us to take clients who are at high risk to re-offend, in need of supervision, and have high behavioral health needs. These persons require additional expertise and a cadre of staff that are well trained in trauma informed care, behavioral health, crisis de-escalation, self-defense, etc.

OCCA requests a funding increase in HB 110 that would restore the Halfway House line item (501405) to pre-pandemic levels and fulfill the previous General Assembly’s commitment to staff increases that unfortunately were stripped as a result of the pandemic. The change in the budget we are asking for is an increase of \$2,451,500 in fiscal year 2022 (from \$70,019,786 to \$72,471,286) and an increase of \$4,903,000 in fiscal year 2023 (from \$70,019,786 to \$74,922,786).

TREATMENT

We support the governor’s investment in recovery. We are enthusiastic supporters of prioritizing services and coordinating efforts in behavioral health treatment – mental illness and substance use disorders. Our member agencies conducted a self-audit of the types of services that our agencies subsidize or perform over and above the state per diem and found that we go over the contracted rate by almost \$9M for transitional control clients alone. These are unreimbursed services that we cannot continue without additional funding.

It is our hope that you continue to see the value and utility of Ohio’s DRC licensed halfway houses and CBCFs by preserving and fully funding the services that we provide to justice-involved individuals. Please call on us for any reason related to the process or to tour a facility. We look forward to working with you. Kindly forward any additional queries to:

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Endnotes/References

¹ <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/how-many-americans-are-unnecessarily-incarcerated> page 8