

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB 441.

My name is Amy Jenkins and I am a proud Parole Officer for the State of Ohio serving the entire State. I am currently an ORAS assessor who completes assessments for inmates who are leaving prison and preparing to re enter society. An accurate assessment aids every Parole Officer to hit the ground running with the new Offender and provides basic information to them that could otherwise take some time to gather after release.

This coming February will not only bring my 50th birthday but also mark 25 years of service to the citizens of our State of Ohio. In almost 25 years I have worked in Cleveland, Akron, Dayton, Cincinnati and also served on the US Marshal's TASK Force. I have worked on the streets with our population returning home from prison for almost 22 ½ years. I have not only served the citizens of our state but I am proud to say I was born and raised in the State Of Ohio. I was very fortunate to attend the best private schools, elementary through College and attend Kent State University for my masters. You may wonder the importance of my upbringing. The private Christian education I received heavily promoted the heart of a servant. That is why I am here today. My parents were not the of the wealthy families that easily afforded the tuitions of private school. Instead my father worked sometimes 3 jobs to ensure my sister and I would have the education we received and my mother stayed home to provide a stable and supportive home life for us. My parents example, education and religious upbringing exemplified servanthood and as such, we have both been raised to help others and often put our desires on the back burner to serve others and make our world a better place as a hole.

I often say no Parole Officer said at 5 years old "I want to grow up to be a Parole Officer" We all have interesting stories how we got here. I am not surprised in thinking back now that I am able to serve our great State. However, I am also here now to serve our next generation of Parole Officers, State of Ohio and all citizens living here. The State of Ohio is at critical point where no one wants to even show up for any of the almost 100 vacant Parole Officer positions currently. We will have a significant number of people retiring soon, within the next 5-10 years, myself included. Many Officers today are leaving the State for Federal and County agencies due to retirement that occurs after 20 years of service, not 32 to 33 years. Those 12-13 years are unmeasurable not only physically but mentally and emotionally as well. Parole Officers physically do all the things regular Law Enforcement officers do with the exception of writing tickets. However, we deal only with felons who have gone to prison and received their release, many who are violent.

Throughout the last 24 years I have seen the evolution of crime and the violence associated with it. When I began my career we called our supervisors from a pay phone if we didn't have our own cell

phone. Our vests had no pockets and were white, to be worn under dress clothes and be concealed, if we opted to wear them at all. Today, we are mandated to wear the vest and often go to home visits, mistaken for the police or a TASK force. We no longer dress in nice clothing or suits and need to carry with us not only our service weapons, but radios, body cameras, gloves, flashlights, Narcan and tourniquets to name a few. As crime has evolved and will continue to do, we have had to evolve as well. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer people want to remain Parole Officers when they can go to other agencies that don't require the same amount of service to retire and also pay significantly more. You can't fault them for wanting the pay to risk ratio to fall in their favor. However, this then burdens the remaining Officers causing higher case loads, overwhelmed staff, higher stress and exhaustion which leads to a more risky work environment. All those components result in the situation where we find ourselves today. Parole Officer positions 24 years ago were almost impossible to get hired into. I know I waited over a year for the state to call me as there were no vacancies, but today the jobs can not be filled fast enough.

It is imperative that the State keep up with local and Federal agencies not only with retirement but caseload caps. If not, those who seek to serve the community will go to Federal or county agencies and our State will suffer. The caseloads Officer are faced with will become the detriment the citizens of Ohio will have to live with. A mandated policy will support the safety of our citizens, reduce the room for error by Parole Officers and combined with a reduced retirement age make the job of Parole Officer one where the servant minded can not only work but enjoy that work. I have given over 2 decades of my life to serving the State of Ohio and will hopefully, one day be part of the community relying on the safety provided by Parole Officers of this state. I implore you to vote for HB 441, it will ultimately give Parole Officers the "Thank You" they never receive and will show the gratitude I know many have for the difficult jobs we do.