

House Homeland Security Committee/ Opponent Testimony /
Interested Party
Ohio House Bill 230
Written Testimony Only

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To Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Homeland Security Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 230.

I am greatly concerned about the provisions in HB 230 that address drug trafficking sentences. I fear that it will cause further harm to people of color and ultimately fail to address the root causes of drug trafficking and drug addiction.

It will not keep our communities safe nor will it offer a deterrent for people who have no other option to make money except for drug trafficking. The money involved in drug trafficking is likely still going to be the deciding factor for why someone decides to traffick drugs rather than the length of a possible prison sentence. Additionally, putting drug traffickers in prison for longer does not eliminate drug trafficking. This bill does not curb the demand for illicit drugs, and despite incarcerating some, there are always going to be more people who are willing (or have little choice but) to sell them. This bill provides the wrong solution to this ongoing drug crisis.

I am a former police officer, and I have seen the reality of drug overdoses and the impact of drug addiction firsthand. However, I have also witnessed how the prison system largely fails at rehabilitation and as a deterrent. Moreover, after I left the police force, I have become aware of the reality of mass incarceration as the New Jim Crow for people of color. If you haven't read the book, *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander, I would highly recommend it. Thus, this bill will further entrench systemic racism in our criminal legal system.

According to the Sentencing Project, Black men are eight times more likely to be imprisoned than white men, and Latino men are 2.5 times more likely to be imprisoned than white men.¹ In Ohio, Black Ohioans are 5.7 percent more likely to be imprisoned than white Ohioians.² Moreover, it gets even worse for longer prison sentences. In 2019, despite being just 14% of the U.S. population, Black Americans constituted 46% of the prison population who had served at least 10 years.

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/mass-incarceration-trends/#50-years>

²

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/us-criminal-justice-data/#detail?state1Option=Vermont&state2Option=0>

It is also important to think about the wider impacts of increased incarceration on not just the individuals but also on their larger communities. As the Sentencing Project reports:

“Imprisonment leads to declining prospects for employment and results in lower earnings in the longer term.⁶ Food insecurity, housing instability, and reliance on public assistance are also associated with prior imprisonment.⁷ Children of incarcerated parents suffer tremendously; imprisonment of a parent leads to significant declines in academic and health outcomes for children.⁸ High levels of incarceration also destabilizes entire communities, leading to dissolution of informal networks that are known to serve as barriers to neighborhood crime.⁹ Trust in law enforcement deteriorates as community members experience elevated levels of victimization and the loss of community members, friends, and family members to incarceration.¹⁰”³

Therefore, increasing the imprisonment of people who are drug traffickers only further destabilizes communities who have already had to endure 50 years of mass incarceration, racism, divestment, and more. Thus, the cycle of incarceration will continue, as barriers to neighborhood crime deteriorate and lower academic outcomes for children of incarcerated parents could lead to their children becoming incarcerated. Therefore, I fear that HB 230 will cause grave harm to communities who are already suffering. I would rather see the legislature actually invest in communities where drug trafficking is highest: funding schools, providing parks and green spaces, increasing viable employment opportunities that support their families, offering business loans to local businesses in those communities, and more.

In terms of drug addiction, this bill really does not impact it at all, because people addicted to drugs will probably find another drug dealer if their drug trafficker is in prison. This bill does not stop the flow of drugs into Ohio. I would rather see drug addiction treatment facilities and housing services for those addicted to drugs. I think that would be a more effective means of stopping drug addiction. Yes, stopping the flow of drugs can seem like a good solution; however, I don't think we have found a way of successfully stopping that. If people with drug addiction receive treatment and are connected to communities that foster their recovery, the demand for illicit drugs might go down in Ohio.

Overall, I do not think that increased incarceration for people convicted of drug trafficking is a viable solution for stopping drug trafficking and drug addiction. It will continue to destabilize communities already facing years of mass incarceration and continue to harm people of color disproportionately. It does nothing to actually help those addicted to drugs. We need more creative solutions rooted in building positive outcomes for communities and people. Solutions should build relationships and networks of support in communities rather than tearing them further apart. I, therefore, urge the committee to reject HB230. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. If you have further questions, you can email me at mackenzie.doyle@srcharitycinti.org.

³ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/mass-incarceration-trends/#50-years>