



OHIO COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS ASSOCIATION
TESTIMONY

HB 33

SUBMITTED TO THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

By: Linda Janes
May 30, 2023

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

My name is Linda Janes and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Alvis, a non-profit human services agency with facilities in Chillicothe, Columbus, Lima, and Toledo. I have over 35 years of experience in corrections, and I am currently the President of the Ohio Community Corrections Association (OCCA) which is comprised of 38 nonprofit, residential reentry treatment facilities across the state serving all 88 counties.

The Ohio Community Corrections Association is committed to helping people who have criminal histories successfully reenter their neighborhoods as productive citizens. Ohio community correctional programs, including halfway houses, community based correctional facilities (CBCFs), and Community Corrections Act programs are good stewards of public resources. Within our membership, we represent **two separate budget line items** in the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's (DRC) budget:

- GRF line item 501405 for licensed halfway houses – House appropriation: \$78,832,000 in FY 2024, \$84,676,000 in FY 2025
- GRF line item 501501, which includes OCCA's five **nonprofit** run Community Based Correctional Facilities¹ – House appropriation: \$94,545,000 in FY 2024, \$99,657,000 in FY 2025

I am here to focus on the line item that specifically funds halfway houses:

- Programs that provide residential supervision and treatment services for participants with criminal justice involvement,
- Primarily focus on transitioning participants back to the community and assist with obtaining employment, stable housing, and connecting them to support services they can access independently, and
- Offer specialized services for substance abusers, sex offenders, and the mentally ill.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to offer testimony on the budget. OCCA supports both the as-introduced and the House versions of the budget, which have an increase for residential community corrections. We applaud the administration and General Assembly's commitment to community corrections and recognition of the important role we play in reducing both recidivism and the prison population.

The efforts of the Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction have made Ohio a national leader in evidence-based community corrections programs. We work diligently to restore citizens by teaching pro-social approaches to problem solving, job skills, and assumption of responsibility for harm caused to communities because of criminal choices.

We pride ourselves on providing effective correctional and treatment sanctions while assuring for accountability. Ohio has made significant steps forward to **reduce costs and improve public safety**.

Programs rooted in research address behavioral health issues and are **proven** to reduce recidivism. The most recent DRC report on halfway house recidivism demonstrated 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. Clients can work and/or attend school while participating in treatment, save financial resources, pay child support, and learn skills that contribute to successful reentry.

¹ There are 18 CBCFs in Ohio, five are operated by non-profit agencies. Those five are members of OCCA.

TREATMENT

We also support the Governor's investment in recovery. Our clients are much more likely to have mental illness and/or substance use disorders than the general population. We believe in prioritizing services and coordinating efforts in behavioral health treatment (for mental illness and substance use disorders).

In this budget, OCCA supports language on reimbursement for psychotropic drugs, medication assisted treatment, and drugs used in withdrawal management or detoxification at CBCFs (MHACD2). Access to healthcare (especially treatment for mental health and substance use disorders) is a critical component of efforts to both improve the lives of criminal justice-involved individuals and reduce recidivism. This is also important for our halfway houses. We continue our own work on this front with Ohio Medicaid to gain access to Medicaid for the transitional control and treatment transfer clients served by our member halfway houses.

COMPETITIVE LABOR MARKET

Halfway houses are now serving clients who are higher need, more violent, and at higher risk to reoffend. These persons require additional expertise and a cadre of staff that are well trained in trauma-informed care, behavioral health, and crisis de-escalation. In order to retain this higher level of staff, we need the commensurate financial resources.

Our line staff have challenging jobs. They are responsible for monitoring clients' movement in the community, preventing drugs from entering our facilities, conducting security screenings and rounds, leading structured activities and teaching life skills. Ohio's rising wages for unskilled labor mean we often are assisting our clients in finding employment at higher wages than we can currently pay many of our own staff.

Our members are so grateful for the additional resources placed in the 501405 budget line item, and we ask that you protect this funding which allow our agencies to increase the starting wages for our staff who serve on the front lines of this demanding work that ultimately improves public safety for the benefit of all Ohioans.

Community corrections serves as both an alternative to incarceration for the State of Ohio and as a pre-release program for the tens of thousands of people returning to Ohio's communities from prison each year. We are grateful for this administration's demonstrated appreciation of the value and utility of Ohio's DRC licensed halfway houses and CBCFs. Please call on us if you have any questions or if you would like to tour a facility.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions. Kindly forward any additional queries to:

Brooke Cheney
Lobbyist, Governmental Policy Group
(614) 461-9335

Lusanne Green
Executive Director, OCCA
(614) 252-8417 x 357