

**44<sup>th</sup> House District**

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**Columbus Office**  
Vern Riffe Center  
77 South High Street, 11<sup>th</sup>  
Floor,  
Columbus, OH 43215  
Phone: (614) 466-1418  
[Rep44@ohiohouse.gov](mailto:Rep44@ohiohouse.gov)

**State Representative Joshua E. Williams**  
**Ohio House of Representatives**

Chairman Click, Vice-Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Community Revitalization Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 680 today.

As a criminal defense attorney, I can confidently say that judges sometimes rule in ways that are incomprehensible to the layperson. While this is a risk we accept to live in a republic with co-equal branches of government, when judges arbitrarily risk peoples' pathways to sobriety and addiction-recovery, it becomes imperative for the legislature to step in.

House Bill 680 is a simple, narrowly-tailored fix to an abuse of judicial discretion: House Bill 680 simply ensures that judges cannot arbitrarily force a defendant to seek treatment at a non-profit substance use disorder facility versus a for-profit substance use disorder facility. Essentially, this bill states that judges cannot discriminate between for-profit status and nonprofit status when ordering a defendant to receive substance use or mental health treatment, based solely on the status of the provider.

To explain why this is needed, let me tell you a story; as an attorney, one of my clients was a young woman who was simultaneously working her way through sobriety and the legal system for possession of a controlled substance. She was arrested and charged with possession, she'd been through multiple substance abuse rehabilitation facilities that

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were nonprofits, where every time she exited or "graduated" fall back into drug addiction.

After three failed attempts, she decided to use a for-profit substance abuse rehabilitation program, where after eighteen months of in-patient, intensive outpatient, and further group treatments, she not only had stopped abusing substances, but she'd rented an apartment of her own for the first time as an adult and had a full-time job providing for herself. At the end of those eighteen months, though, she still had to be sentenced for her drug possession. We attempted to enroll her in the drug court program, but she was told that she would have to discontinue care with the for-profit program and start from scratch by reenrolling in a non-profit, in-patient treatment program, losing all the momentum she had built towards her long-term sobriety. I watched this young adult, just starting life, he chose her sobriety over becoming a felon, I stood next to her as she pled guilty, as a 19-year-old, to a felony just so she could stay with her for-profit treatment provider. I want to applaud, Team Recovery in Toledo and their amazing staff, for providing the quality treatment that she needed to stay on a path to lifelong sobriety.

But, I want to be clear about what happened. This young lady plead guilty to a felony charge that had a presumption of probation, just so she could stay sober. She was sentenced to probation and continued drug treatment at the for-profit facility. Her probation was ordered to last two years. That means she would have to complete

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probation and wait one year to seal her record, because we recently changed it from 3 years to just one year. This was November of 2023, my first year in this General Assembly, when I stood next to this young lady while she was sentenced to two years of probation. Three years later she just became eligible to seal her felony on February 8<sup>th</sup> of 2026. I no longer represent her, I was court appointed, pro bono meaning I represented her for free, just so I could make a difference. If I had a number for her, I would call her to let her know how to get her record sealed for free. If she ever gets to see this hearing, I want to apologize to her because we, as a community, as a state, and as a legislature; we let you down. Today, in the final months of my time serving in this legislative body, I am attempting to correct a horrible wrong that was done to her and to our community.

Even though this woman had successfully rebuilt her life under the care of a for-profit rehab program, the judge cruelly and arbitrarily refused to consider it as a treatment option due to his belief that the use of public funds to provide substance abuse treatment should be reserved for non-profit entities. House Bill 680 is a simple fix to ensure that our most vulnerable populations are never forced to decide between their sobriety and their ability to live a normal life because a judge doesn't have their best interests at heart. I humbly ask this committee to help me right a terrible wrong and assure that those suffering

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from substance abuse have every opportunity to break the cycle and free themselves from the criminal justice system.

Thank you again Chairwoman White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and I welcome any questions you may have.