

PROPONENT TESTIMONY (Written Only)
House Bill 211 – House Judiciary Committee | November 13, 2025

Wendy Tarr, Executive Director | Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope (ARCH)

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 211. My name is Wendy Tarr, and I serve as the Executive Director of ARCH (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope) in Franklin County. ARCH provides reentry housing, workforce development, and family stabilization support for individuals returning to the community after incarceration. Many of the people we serve are parents of young children.

In our work, we meet many caregivers who are deeply committed to their children but have been separated due to incarceration. We see firsthand the disruption that occurs when a primary caregiver is removed from the home. Research shows that children with an incarcerated parent are at increased risk of emotional trauma, school instability, behavioral challenges, and negative long-term outcomes, including a significantly higher likelihood of later involvement in the justice system. The longer the separation, the more lasting the harm.

[*\(Annie E. Casey Foundation. A Shared Sentence. 2016.\)*](#)

House Bill 211 does not remove judicial discretion or guarantee a specific sentence. Rather, it ensures that when a court is already deciding between incarceration and community control, the court is provided clear and consistent information regarding whether the individual is a primary caregiver. This allows for a more complete and informed sentencing decision. The bill also promotes greater consistency across counties by standardizing how caregiver status is identified in Presentence Investigation (PSI) reports.

When eligible caregivers serve their sentence under community control rather than incarceration, they are able to maintain family stability, participate in treatment and employment, reduce reliance on public systems, and better support positive outcomes for their families. These outcomes support rehabilitation and strengthen community safety.

We respectfully recommend two adjustments/clarifications to strengthen the bill:

1. **Expand the definition of caregiver** to include individuals responsible for elderly or dependent adult family members, not only minor children. This will help prevent unnecessary displacement or institutionalization of older adults and disabled dependents.
2. **Clarify that caregiver responsibilities may be considered a mitigating factor during sentencing.** Doing so will support judges in making informed decisions when a community-based sentence is appropriate and safe.

By ensuring caregiver status is consistently identified in Presentence Investigation reports and appropriately considered during sentencing, House Bill 211 supports family stability and allows courts to exercise discretion with a fuller understanding of household responsibilities. This measured approach reduces avoidable trauma to children and dependent adults, improves rehabilitation outcomes, and strengthens long-term community wellbeing.

Ohio has taken meaningful steps in recent years to promote smarter, more effective justice practices, and this bill aligns with that progress. With an estimated **one in every fourteen children in Ohio** having experienced parental incarceration, House Bill 211 provides a practical, family-centered tool that can help reduce unnecessary separation and allow eligible caregivers to serve their sentences in the community when it is safe to do so. We urge your support and thank you for your consideration.