

## Darren Price – Prepared Testimony – House Bill 338 (Andy's Law)

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Darren Price, and I am retired from the state of Ohio with 34+ years of service (31+ with the state of Ohio), including service with the Emergency Management Division of the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, which is where I served for the first half of my career; including during the riot at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in 1993. I am currently a homeland security consultant and an adjunct professor, teaching homeland security and criminal justice courses. I am here today to express my strong support for House Bill 338, known as Andy's Law.

I mentored and trained Andy when he was first hired into the ODRC at the Ross Correctional Institution. In addition to being a fellow Correction Officer, Andy was a fellow U.S. Army Veteran and my friend. Andy's Law is about protecting the men and women who protect us and is named in honor of Andy Lansing, whose murder at the hands of an inmate exposed serious gaps in how Ohio safeguards its correctional employees. This bill will put long overdue changes in place so that the death, the murder, of Correction Officer Andy Lansing, as well as Case Manager Bonita Haynes, Correction Officer Bobby Vallandingham, Correction Officer Thomas Davis, Jr., Teacher Beverly Taylor, OPI Shop Foreman Eric Bowling, and far too many other ODRC staff, will not be in vain. No family should endure such a loss, and Andy's Law will put long-needed provisions in place to protect correctional staff, as well as contractors, volunteers, and visitors.

Ohio's correctional institutions are among the most dangerous workplaces in the United States. Assaults on staff are rising, and these incidents often involve individuals already serving time for violent offenses. Correction Officers cannot walk away from danger. They are required to confront it daily in confined spaces with limited backup. Yet the current sentencing guidelines often fail to reflect the seriousness of these attacks or deter future violence.

Andy's Law sends a strong message that violence against correctional employees, contractors, volunteers, and visitors will not be tolerated by increasing the penalties for aggravated murder, felonious assault, and assault. Under this bill, an inmate who purposely causes the death of a correctional employee will face life imprisonment without parole, and the option for the death penalty will remain as a sentencing option. Andy's Law will ensure that those who murder correctional staff will never be released from prison. This bill will also strengthen penalties for those inmates who assault staff with bodily fluids by imposing a mandatory prison sentence of three to six years, depending on the severity of the assault.

One of the most unconscionable failures by the ODRC and the state of Ohio following Andy's murder was the termination of his family's medical, dental, and vision insurance within a week of his death. The correspondence from ODRC, dated December 30, 2024—just five days after his murder—abruptly left Andy's wife, Chun, and their son without healthcare coverage. This is beyond reprehensible and only further exacerbates their suffering. HB 338 corrects this injustice by ensuring continued healthcare coverage for the spouse and dependents of any correctional employee killed in the line of duty. No family should face such cold-hearted, callous treatment from the state of Ohio/ODRC, and this must never happen again.

In addition, Andy's Law will strengthen leadership within the ODRC by requiring that the Director meet specific professional qualifications, ensuring the department is led by someone with real-world experience in corrections, administration, and security. This reform increases accountability and ensures correctional policies are guided by expertise and experience, not by a political appointee with limited to no background and experience in the field of corrections. The requirement for the Director of the ODRC to meet specific professional qualifications is consistent with other law enforcement entities across Ohio which have requirements for their respective head of department, including the Ohio State Highway Patrol (per ORC 5503.01), county Sheriff's (per ORC 311.01), and local police chiefs in some instances (e.g., City of Tiffin, OH Ordinance 149.033). In addition, states such as Indiana and Texas have requirements for the Director of their respective prison systems.

HB 338 also includes a provision for the use of trained K-9 units to detect drugs and contraband, as well as to deter violence. This is especially critical as the K-9s will reduce the massive amounts of drugs being smuggled daily into Ohio prisons by inmate visitors. The addition of the K-9 units will serve as an invaluable resource for officer safety, threat prevention, and contraband detection, thereby making Ohio's prisons safer.

Collectively, the provisions contained within Andy's Law will enhance deterrence and increase safety and security for every person inside Ohio's prisons and jails. The passage of Andy's Law will affirm our commitment to the correctional professionals who protect our communities from behind the walls of prisons and jails across Ohio, often at great personal risk. I personally earned this metal plate during a use of force with an inmate. I was fortunate. I only had to endure three surgeries and being off work for four months, but at least I got to go home. Andy and the 25+ staff members who have died in the line of duty with the ODRC did not.

In closing, I respectfully urge this Committee to advance House Bill 338. Andy's Law is more than legislation; it is a statement that reinforces our values as a society. It honors Andy's sacrifice and reaffirms that Ohio will protect those who protect us. More succinctly, it will ensure Andy Lansing did not die in vain.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.