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Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 338. My name is Jeff Dieringer, and I am the Political and Research Coordinator for SEIU District 1199 WV/KY/OH.

We are proud to represent over 4,200 State of Ohio workers, including nurses, social workers, physicians, parole officers, recovery services counselors, case managers, and others who serve on the frontlines in and outside of Ohio's prisons and juvenile facilities every day. They work alongside correctional officers and other institutional staff to ensure inmates and youths receive quality care and help them become productive members of our communities. We believe this bill takes a step in the right direction by ensuring our members can do what they do best while protecting them from injury and violence. Even a single staff assault is too many, and the State has failed to protect and support workers in jobs that many are afraid to do. We have seen countless members suffer injuries, both physical and mental, that still impact them today. Many of these inmates face no serious consequences, and they are aware of it. They will keep committing these terrible acts against staff unless there are more serious penalties, which HB 338 provides by requiring consecutive mandatory sentences for assault or felonious assault and for harassment with a bodily substance. It will also help prevent the influx of drugs into our institutions that have severe consequences for our members. The long-term health effects of exposure to fumes from tene and fentanyl are extremely damaging.

This is a step in the right direction, but we need to do more! Our institutions face a critical crossroads, and the State has neglected the issue for too long; we can't wait any longer. The State must intervene and fund our institutions by fixing the deteriorating infrastructure, increasing funding to raise wages and improve benefits to address staffing shortages, and following up to make sure cases are actually being prosecuted. The sentencing changes will be meaningless if cases are not pursued, even the ones that seem less significant. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will take any questions from the committee.