

Good afternoon, Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today regarding the department's FY26-27 operating budget request.

Our mission is to "Reduce Recidivism Among Those We Touch." Our Vision is to "Reduce Crime in Ohio." The department is responsible for incarceration, parole and post-release control supervision, and many different contracts and grants that support community corrections. Operating safe prisons for those who work in, live in, or visit them is paramount.

On Christmas Day Officer Andy Lansing was murdered at Ross Correctional Institution. Pure evil. A senseless horrific murder. He was working voluntary overtime on Christmas Day so other people could be off. His family expected him home and now their lives will never be the same. He was a husband, a father, a brother, an officer, a veteran, a mentor, and a very caring man. A truly good guy whose life ended way too soon. There is no way his family and friends or our department will ever be the same. We pray for the Lansing family and the RCI family and ask that you do the same.

The department always needs to carefully balance safety and rehabilitation; you will see this reflected in our budget request. Additional investment is needed to ensure we continue to increase safety and give the staff the tools they need while also performing our mission.

We are efficiently using the criminal justice options in this state. Collaboration across many entities effectively diverts lower-level offenders away from prison. At one time, nearly half of the new commitments to prison were non-violent, now only 25% are non-violent. Consequently 78% of the those currently housed in the department have committed a crime of violence in their lifetime. This sharp increase means that the inmates the staff supervise are more dangerous than they have been in the past. During this administration we have taken many steps to increase safety and decrease drug use including drone detection, drug sniffing dogs, body scanners, body worn cameras and more. Now we are taking another step to finish what we started. In the current fiscal year, we are implementing a pilot at two facilities to equip the officers with Taser 10's. In the executive budget request before you, funding is included to move past the pilot to statewide implementation.

In addition to the new safety equipment, we plan to hire additional officers and bring back shift sergeants. We decreased our vacancy rate by 360 correction officers this biennium; our statewide vacancy rate is currently 7.4%. We anticipate hiring an additional 400 correction officers in the next biennium. Some of those officers will be in newly created positions at higher security level prisons, some will be filling the vacancies we have. We also anticipate creating a position called a shift sergeant.



Shift sergeants are union members permanently assigned to provide help to a very new workforce. They will answer questions, mentor, and show newly trained officers how to actually do the job after they begin working as permanent officers. We built 7 prisons about 30 years ago and this means we have over 3,200 staff eligible to retire at about the same time. Shift sergeants will concentrate on providing the mentorship that new officers need.

We are experiencing the lowest new crime recidivism rate since passage of the 1996 Truth in Sentencing legislation. There are many reasons for this. For example, the department has expanded programming and reentry efforts both inside and outside prisons. Despite the low new crime recidivism rate, DRC's prison population rose significantly in the past two years. The reason, in part, is due to DRC's implementation of a violence predictor tool and the supervision strategies that accompany it. This allows the Adult Parole Authority to identify violators quickly and return them to prison, thereby protecting the community. The people being supervised are more dangerous for our parole officers. Parole officers play a key role in making Ohio streets safer. Incidents that require gunfire are on the rise. We have already upgraded the body armor they wear for protection, provided short-barrel rifles to the task force officers, and purchased other tools to assist them in keeping our communities and themselves safe. During this administration, with the help of Governor DeWine and the legislature, we have managed to reduce the average parole officer caseload from 1:77 to 1:48. We have substantially increased the number of supervisees who wear ankle monitors. Parole officers now have the ability to rapidly share location information with law



enforcement. The executive budget submission includes the funding to support this increase in ankle monitoring.

Our projections show the prison population increasing by at least 1,000 by July of 2027. An increasing population will cause us to re-open previously closed beds which will require additional staff and impact operational costs. One location we anticipate reopening will concentrate on treating mentally ill people.

In addition to the increasing population, the most significant budget drivers are inflation and staffing. Seventy-two percent of the budget is tied to staffing either civil servant or contract, both of which are controlled by contractually obligated increases. Hiring correction officers will remain a priority to reduce mandatory overtime and support better quality of life for officers and their families. Eight percent of the budget directly funds community corrections initiatives. Together staffing and funds sent to local communities account for 80% of the budget. The remaining 20% of the budget is at the mercy of inflation and includes things like food, health care, utilities, clothing and other necessary supplies.

We release about 18,000 people a year, people who need jobs. Making the right investments with this population will prepare them to be part of the workforce solution. We have the workforce Ohio needs. In order for them to be productive members of society they need housing, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment and education both academic and vocational. Twenty-three percent of the people in prison are mentally ill, 68% need substance abuse treatment, and 27% come to us with a reading level less than 6th grade.

The Governor outlined the need to address addiction and mental health. He urged us to train and prepare a workforce to meet 21st century needs in Ohio. He seeks to keep Ohioans safe and help all Ohioans live up to their fullest potential. The funding we have requested in the executive budget directly supports these goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about our needs and our vision. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.