Senate Bill 291
Senate Judiciary Committee
Sponsor Testimony
Senator Nathan H. Manning
November 19th, 2025

Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 291. The goal of this bill is to make needed changes to community control sanctions for both felony and misdemeanor offenses. Public safety across the state will be increased by making community control more consistent and effective.

We worked with a variety of experts to draft this legislation including judges, probation officers, and other stakeholders. The goal of community control is often rehabilitation, and it has seen great success in the lives of many individuals in Ohio. However, we want to ensure that these sanctions are used more consistently and effectively based on offenses.

Currently, the law allows community control sentences to up to 5 years-probation for any offense, including a low-level misdemeanor. Judges are ultimately given discretion when it comes to sentencing, meaning some people are getting community control terms that are tailored to their individual case, while others with similar fact patterns are automatically getting the maximum 5 years. Misdemeanors and low-level felonies should not be treated the same under the law as high-level felonies when it comes to sentencing community control.

Furthermore, there is often overutilization of community control. By imposing blanket 5-year probation terms, there is little consideration of whether it is a good use of taxpayer dollars, probation officer and community control resources, or in the best interest of public safety. We believe that Senate Bill 291 would help to solve these issues by restructuring the community control system and improving responses to technical violations.

First, the five-year probation cap will be left in place for the most serious offenses, but an initial three-year cap will be put in place for less serious felonies and misdemeanors. Those who have satisfied their court and probation ordered conditions and requirements will be able to be considered for early termination. This will help to incentive individuals on supervision to meet those requirements and help them move towards rehabilitation.

Importantly, this does not eliminate judicial discretion. Judges will retain the ability to keep someone on community control for up to the current maximum five-year term through an extension process after the determination is made that more time is needed for rehabilitation or public safety purposes.

Secondly, the bill looks to improve responses to technical violations. Under current law, an individual could be sent to prison for breaching the rules of their supervision even on a first-time minor offense. Senate Bill 291 looks to remedy this by imposing a series of increasingly serious community-based punishments for first and then subsequent technical violations.

Members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing us to testify. We would be happy to answer questions at this time.