Senate Bill 291

In the Senate Judiciary Committee

Committee Hearing on March 11, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

To Chair Manning, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and the Esteemed Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee,

As Legislative Manager for REFORM Alliance, I write on behalf of my organization in support of Senate Bill 291. At REFORM Alliance, we aim to transform community supervision by changing laws, systems, and culture to create real pathways to meaningful second chances. We believe that a justice system that holds people accountable and redirects them back to work and wellbeing leads to safer communities. To date, we have passed 22 bipartisan bills in 12 states, creating pathways for more than 850,000 people to exit the system.

REFORM stands in strong support of SB 291. This bill strengthens Ohio's community supervision system by setting clear, uniform limits on how long people can remain under community control; allowing early termination for those who demonstrate sustained compliance; and providing judges with practical, proportional responses to technical violations. By modernizing the definition of a technical violation, expanding alternatives to incarceration, and ensuring supervision terms are fair and consistent, this bill promotes accountability while supporting stability, rehabilitation, and public safety.

Across the state, courts are permitted to impose community control terms of up to five years for nearly any offense, including misdemeanors. While judges may use this discretion in different ways, reliance on the maximum term in some cases can result in supervision lengths that do not always reflect distinctions between lower-level offenses and more serious felonies. Unnecessarily lengthy terms are not aligned with rehabilitation or public safety goals, and are an inefficient use of scarce supervision resources. Under SB 291, lower level felonies and misdemeanors are capped at three years, while the most serious offenses retain the current five year cap.

It is important to note that while this legislation seeks to create balance in the system by tiering community control caps, it will also promote greater transparency when a court orders an extension of someone's supervision term. SB 291 establishes a clear decision-making framework that permits courts to extend a term up to five years if they find that additional time is needed for an individual to complete treatment, finish court ordered programming, or satisfy restitution obligations. By contrast, current law allows these extensions to occur with very little structure, which often leads to people staying under community control for reasons unrelated to risk or readiness.

This balanced approach preserves judicial discretion while eliminating the inconsistent and disproportionate extensions that can occur under current law. It provides individuals with a clearer understanding of what must be accomplished to complete supervision and gives courts a more reliable framework for making decisions. In doing so, SB 291 ensures that community control is balanced, evidence-based, and focused on rehabilitation and accountability.

In addition, SB 291 strengthens pathways to early termination for people who demonstrate sustained compliance. The bill requires a court, within 60 days after an individual has completed two years of a felony community control sanction, to review whether the supervision should be terminated. If the court finds that all conditions for early termination have been met, it must end the community control without holding a hearing. If the conditions have not been fully satisfied, the court is required to hold a hearing to determine whether the supervision should be terminated. These provisions create a predictable and timely process that rewards compliance and progress, rather than allowing individuals to remain under supervision by default. By providing clear deadlines and criteria, SB 291 incentivizes people to complete treatment, restitution, and programming, while also ensuring courts can make decisions that are both fair and consistent across the state.

Under Ohio law, a technical violation occurs when an individual on community supervision fails to comply with the conditions of their supervision, even if they have not committed a new crime. Currently, this definition is limited to individuals convicted of certain low-level felonies, meaning that people with more serious felony convictions cannot be sanctioned for technical violations in the same way. As a result, individuals in similar circumstances can face very different legal consequences depending on the severity of their underlying offense.

Ohio courts currently have extremely broad authority to respond to violations of community control. Judges can extend a person's supervision term, impose more restrictive conditions, require residential placements, or order jail or prison time for technical violations. Because the law provides few uniform standards to guide these decisions, responses to similar behavior vary widely across the state. In one county, a minor reporting error or missed appointment might result in a brief sanction, while in another county the same behavior could lead to months of incarceration or extended supervision. These inconsistencies are not driven by public safety needs but by the absence of clear statutory guidance, leaving outcomes largely dependent on local practice and judicial philosophy.

SB 291 addresses these issues by expanding the definition of technical violations to include all felonies and creating a graduated system of sanctions that increase only when a person repeatedly fails to comply. This approach emphasizes accountability without resorting to incarceration for minor or first-time violations and provides predictable, consistent standards for individuals under supervision, probation departments, and the courts.

For these reasons, REFORM Alliance strongly supports SB 291. By setting clear limits on supervision terms, creating consistent pathways for early termination, and modernizing responses to technical violations, the bill strengthens Ohio's community supervision system in a way that promotes accountability, rehabilitation, and public safety. We urge the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee to pass SB 291 and advance these meaningful reforms that ensure fair, proportional, and evidence-based supervision for all individuals under the court's care.

Sincerely,

Sha Sanders

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Legislative Manager
REFORM Alliance