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Senator Cecil Thomas - Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 272
Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee
April 20, 2016

Members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, thank you again for giving us the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 272. I'd also like to thank Senator Eklund, my joint sponsor on this legislation, as well as Senators Lehner, Seitz, Brown, Tavares, and Hite for their co-sponsorship.

A bipartisan group of legislators in Ohio have shown leadership in moving us toward a "smart on crime" approach to criminal justice policy. Senate Bill 272 is reflective of this approach for a number of reasons and I'd like to take this opportunity to share just a few of them with you today.

- Scientific research has demonstrated that teenagers make decisions differently from their adult counterparts. The same research has demonstrated youth are in a developmental stage that makes rehabilitation a reality for them.
- It makes good fiscal sense to allow rehabilitated Ohioans an opportunity to prove they are worthy of rejoining the community. At a time when Ohio spends over \$1.6 billion annually on prisons, it is our responsibility to identify inmates that are ready to realize their full potential as citizens, which will carry numerous benefits for Ohio taxpayers.
- States such as Maryland and California have passed measures that resemble Senate Bill 272. Since enactment, studies have demonstrated a remarkably low recidivism rate.
- This legislation acknowledges that some people won't be ready to return to the community when they receive review by the Parole Board. That's exactly why this bill allows for parole eligibility, but does not guarantee release.

Sixteen states have already eliminated life without parole as a sentencing option for children, including our neighbors in West Virginia and Kentucky. Companion legislation has also been introduced as House Bill 521 by Representative Manning. I'd like to thank you for considering this bipartisan piece of legislation and we'd be happy to entertain any questions from members of the committee.

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