

Chairman Lang and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee

My name is Sonia Monroy Matis.

I am a member of the Cleveland Chapter of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of more than 42,000 crime victims with several local chapters across Ohio.

As a survivor of crime, I know what it means to be directly impacted by violence. Yet, the over-use of jails and prisons has failed to help too many, like me. It has also failed to help us address our addiction crisis.

It would appear on the surface that a crime victim might call for more incarceration, but that approach hasn't helped our state advance safety. We spend so much of our attention and resources on incarceration and prisons, but this takes away from investing in the resources that help communities be healthier and safer while worsening our addiction crisis.

The Ohio House of Representatives has an opportunity to start down the right path for our state by passing Senate Bill 3 into law.

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault, I know about the stigma and shame that accompany being a victim of crime. I also understand how unaddressed trauma can lead people to dark places to numb the pain. The fact that many of those incarcerated in Ohio prisons are there because of substance abuse is unacceptable. People need to get help to heal from their past and recover from addiction.

We must stop pretending incarceration or felonies will cure addiction. Ohio needs to confront this public health problem with responses focused on prevention, rehabilitation and treatment. Just as we listen to health experts on responding to this coronavirus pandemic, it is critical that we follow their expertise on our response to addiction.

The time has come to end wasteful spending on prisons that fail to make us safer and actually worsen the addiction crisis across our state, undermining the health and safety of our families and communities. We must finally invest in treatment and rehabilitation as the response to addiction, rather than continuing to overly rely on the criminal justice system and prisons.

Ohioans shouldn't have to travel far, or even out of state, to access addiction treatment, yet that is the reality for far too many in our state.

The Ohio Senate took the important step of passing Senate Bill 3 to address addiction in our state and end the counterproductive use of felony convictions and prisons. People with addiction, as well as survivors of crime and others in communities, need access to the critical programs that would be more readily available if we didn't spend billions of taxpayer dollars on ineffective responses.

It is time for the Ohio House to improve our state's response to addiction by passing Senate Bill 3.

Our priorities need to shift, and Senate Bill 3 is an important start. Thank you.

