

**Stephen Massey**  
**Testimony before the Ohio House of Representatives Criminal Justice Committee**  
**November 10, 2020**

Thank you, Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee for inviting me to testify today in support of Senate Bill 3. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my views on this important legislation, which will improve Ohio policy to prioritize public safety, helping to better address addiction and make our state healthier for our communities.

My name is Stephen Massey, and I am the Director of Operations at the CitiLookout Counseling and Trauma Recovery Center in Springfield. We are one of the state's several Trauma Recovery Centers, which were launched in 2017 through [the support from then-Attorney General and now Governor Mike DeWine and the Alliance for Safety and Justice](#). We are funded by federal Victim of Crime Act grants managed through the office of Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, who is a champion of crime victim services and our work to provide them. Our mandate is to quickly and efficiently connect victims of crime to services that are crucial to their health, safety and wellbeing. Our center has been central to serving crime victims in the Dayton and Springfield areas, including those who survived the 2019 Dayton shooting—civilians, law enforcement and first responders alike.

In addition, I have advanced degrees in mental health counseling and professional coaching, and addiction coaching is one of my specialties. I have been working in Springfield's social service sector since the 1990s.

As you know, Ohio has a stubborn history of using the criminal justice system in response to the immense wave of addiction that has impacted communities and families across our state. This has led to over-incarceration of those who need treatment, exacerbating substance abuse through an over-reliance on prisons. This undermines public health and safety. Our state prison system has operated at 135 percent of capacity for years and our prison population is larger than that of New York, a state with nearly 8 million more residents. Because of these circumstances, Ohio spends nearly \$2 billion on prisons every year. Meanwhile, local treatment needs too often go unmet: [Ohio has the second highest drug overdose death rate of any state in the nation](#).

SB 3 would begin to address this systemic imbalance by channeling people with addictions toward effective interventions and treatment, rather than the costly use of prisons. The non-partisan Ohio Legislative Service Commission has calculated that SB 3 could result in 2,700 fewer people sentenced to Ohio prisons every year for minor drug possession offenses, saving the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction up to \$75 million every year.

We should all agree that replacing an expensive, ineffective response to addiction with one that is proven to work and costs less money is common sense. Communities where addiction is successfully addressed through treatment are healthier and safer for everyone.

My personal interest, as a clinician and service provider, is in the greater efficacy of therapeutic interventions for individuals afflicted by addiction.

The simple fact is that prison, as a response to addiction, is worse than ineffective. Too many Ohioans with addictions who return to communities after incarceration also return to drug use. People emerge from prison with a felony conviction record, completely hobbling their recovery efforts by blocking access to housing, employment, and other opportunities that promote successful recovery from addiction. Felony convictions also prevent people from accessing critical health and safety resources, such as victim services, which can lead to even further instability. These destabilizing consequences too often reinforce a person's relationship with substance use.

By comparison, community-based addiction treatment provides an opportunity to address the causes of addiction, while supporting someone's capacity to function within the community.

As a member of the victim services profession, over the course of my career I have had the privilege of helping countless people address their trauma. In the aftermath of the 2019 Oregon District mass shooting in Dayton, I have been able to help diverse survivors of that tragic incident access recovery. In the process of doing so, I have also had to inform survivors of the shooting that they were ineligible for state support because of old felony convictions on their record. Crime victims should not be denied support because of a years-old felony conviction. Denying crime victim services to people with such a past conviction because of minor drug possession who have a history of addiction is a recipe for pushing them back to substance abuse.

It is well documented that victims of crime who do not receive victim services can get caught in a downward spiral of trauma and hopelessness that can lead to depression, substance use and more—and helping avoid this outcome has been my life's calling. Addiction is a health issue. The best way to address this health condition is through professional health services and support, not the criminal justice system and prisons.

The joy that accompanies facilitating people's escape from the grip of substance abuse and return to their families, jobs and communities is a balm for the soul.

Our state's leaders all recognize that resolving the crisis of addiction in Ohio is an urgent issue. In 2019, when statistics showed 13 Ohioans dying of a drug overdose every day, Governor Mike DeWine launched a Recovery Ohio to coordinate the work of existing state resources to combat this scourge. Now, with so much uncertainty unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the problem, sadly, has become even more urgent: this spring, at least 532 Ohioans died of a drug overdose in a single month

Passing SB 3 is a common sense, immediate step that Ohio should take as part of its comprehensive response to the addiction crisis in our state. It will ensure that more people in

need get appropriate help—rather than being cycled through a criminal justice system that will exacerbate their condition. It will also free up state resources that could be reallocated to prevention, rehabilitation and treatment.

As someone who has committed his life to helping those in need—on a daily basis, and over the course of more than two decades—I urge you to pass this timely, life-saving legislation.

Thank you.