

**Proponent Written Testimony Submitted to the House Criminal Justice Committee
Senate Bill 3 – Drug Sentencing (Eklund, O’Brien)
November 18, 2020**

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and esteemed members of the House Criminal Justice Committee: on behalf of the Cleveland Browns, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 3.

Some of you may be aware that players on several teams across the NFL, with the support of their clubs, have been advocating and raising awareness for various social justice causes in recent years. In 2017, these players formed the Players Coalition, a formal organization dedicated to making progress in three key areas: criminal justice reform, police/community relations, and education/economic advancement.

Following the formation of the Coalition, the NFL and its member clubs – including the Cleveland Browns – worked to form a joint player-ownership committee focusing on social justice issues. The Cleveland Browns are proud to be a leader in this effort and one of the teams with ownership representation on this committee. We are committed to supporting our players’ advocacy priorities and making our community a better place for all.

Responsible criminal justice reform is, and has been, extremely important to the leadership and players affiliated with the Cleveland Browns, and our organization as a whole. Throughout the past few years, we have worked diligently to educate ourselves on ongoing social justice initiatives throughout the state and speak out in support of common sense reform. It is clear that there has never been a more important time to make our voice heard.

We believe Senate Bill 3 is a responsible, bipartisan, and necessary approach to criminal justice reform in Ohio. We recognize the purpose of this legislation as reforming Ohio’s drug sentencing laws to protect Ohio citizens while enhancing rehabilitation opportunities for non-violent, addicted offenders. Reclassifying certain non-violent, low-level felonies to unclassified misdemeanors enhances the likelihood of rehabilitation and successful reintroduction into society. Without the weight of a felony conviction, individuals are better able to find work, housing, and continued necessary addiction support services. Ohioans must understand that these citizens, and the state as a whole, would greatly benefit from the opportunity to re-enter a labor force that desperately needs them, rather than spending taxpayer dollars for time spent in already overcrowded jails and prisons.

SB 3 also takes major steps forward in addressing Ohio’s opioid epidemic, another cause the Cleveland Browns care deeply about. Ohioans have suffered devastating losses to opioid addiction, a crisis which has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly support the discretion the bill gives judges in determining treatment options for certain low-level, non-violent offenders as opposed to sentencing of prison time. The importance to our society of treating addicted individuals so they can successfully turn their lives around and avoid the cycle

of incarceration cannot be understated. SB 3 directly addresses the importance of treatment in lieu of conviction and expands support for these life-saving services.

The leadership of the Cleveland Browns, together with the Players Coalition, applauds the bill sponsors and this committee for thoughtfully considering this important piece of legislation. It is an organizational priority to give back to our community, and to serve as advocates for Northeast Ohio and encourage our players to use their platforms to positively impact society. Our support of SB 3 is a reflection of these ideals. Thank you once again for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the passage of SB 3, and for your important work on behalf of all Ohioans.