



OHIO ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE, INC.

Chief Bruce Pijanowski
Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
Testimony in Opposition to SB 3
Drug Sentencing Law Reform

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Bruce Pijanowski, the Chief of Police for the City of Delaware, representing the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police.

As an organization, we appreciate the intent of this legislation in being supportive of the treatment and rehabilitation of people who have become victims of their addictions. It is our concern that this legislation will have unintended impacts to those with mental health and addiction issues.

The concept of keeping people with addictions and mental health out of jail is sound, provided there is a safety net in place. Unfortunately, many times it is the jail that is the primary treatment or holding center. In fact, detention may be the only time that an arrestee gets treatment or counseling services. We agree that there can be better ways of addressing this issue, but the proper pieces must be in place and there must be an impetus for people to want to comply. Treatment in the corrections setting is often temporary and with a lack of follow up, and those in treatment slide back into their disease once they are released. It is also important to understand that most people convicted of F4 and F5 offenses do not end up in prison, but instead are mandated to receive treatment under supervision. It is important to have both continuity of treatment and motivation to stay in treatment.

OACP would support a well-rounded approach to this problem that ultimately keeps people out of jail, but does not negatively impact current enforcement abilities. The starting point should be treatment and health care providers and creating availability for diversion to these agencies. There has to be adequate availability of support, both in crisis care and ongoing treatment. Without this support net, any initiative simply to keep people out of jail will still keep them imprisoned in their mental health and addictive behaviors. This is what then leads to the homelessness, crime, overdose and mental health crisis that forms the intersection with the criminal justice system. The deterrent effect of penalties also has to be considered. Treatment courts, diversion and expungement are all better options for providing a fresh start that should be explored before simply reducing sentences.

OACP would submit that if this legislation is enacted, it may prove to be unproductive in terms of health and safety, and will not truly address the underlying problems of addiction and mental health. It does nothing to support those that will be left in the community, and may tend to create unintended impacts on public health in the long term. OACP is opposed to simply reducing penalties but would be more than willing to be engaged in a long term comprehensive approach to reducing addiction and mental health crisis, which we believe would help create the positive outcomes this legislation is hoping to achieve.

Unfortunately, due to Covid restrictions, I am unable to testify in person, but I would be more than willing to entertain questions or conversations from any committee member prior to any vote on this legislation. Thank you for your consideration.