



## Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies

140 East Town Street, Suite 1150, Columbus, Ohio 43215  
Phone: (614) 224-8500 • Fax: (614) 224-2587 • [www.oacaa.org](http://www.oacaa.org)

Janice W. Warner  
*President*

David E. Brightbill  
*1<sup>st</sup> Vice President*

Melissa Pearce  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President*

Ruthann House  
*Treasurer*

Julia Wise  
*Secretary*

Philip E. Cole  
*Executive Director*

### **Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee** May 15, 2019

Philip E. Cole  
Executive Director  
Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies

Good afternoon Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I am Phil Cole, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of S.B. 3.

The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies is an organization that represents Ohio's forty-eight Community Action Agencies serving every county in the State. Community Action Agencies are the primary providers of services to eliminate poverty and to assist those who suffer its ravages as they work to become self-sufficient. We provide a variety of services to our low-income customers including job training and placement, Head Start, affordable housing, health care, transportation, food pantries, home weatherization, and many others. Community Action Agencies serve over 700,000 individual Ohioans, we employ over 6,500 people, and we bring over half billion dollars to Ohio's economy each year.

There are several reasons why we believe in the need for a strong bill to reform drug sentencing laws. Allow me to discuss some of the items that should be present in a reform bill for it be effective.

First, we know that mandatory jail time for offenders has not been shown to be effective. Mandatory jail time for first-time, nonviolent offenders should be eliminated. Judicial discretion should be emphasized for second, third, etc. offenders.

Second, drug treatment is the best treatment for addictions, not prison. Drug treatment should be emphasized for nonviolent offenders and the treatment must actually be available and immediate. This means the bill must include funding for certified mental health agencies or other appropriate treatment facilities. Treatment needs to be expanded, without a time limit if possible, to ensure that adequate treatment is available to the offender. Different people need different times to overcome the problem.

Third, addiction is a family problem, affecting all members of the family of an addict. Treatment should be available, free of charge, for family members of addicts. Family



members need to understand the difficulties facing their loved ones when they complete treatment, as well as the new challenges of family members. Following effective treatment, life will change for all of them.

Fourth, unfortunately drugs are often available in prisons. Therefore, drug testing should be mandated for incarcerated drug offenders.

Fifth, special drug courts have been effective and should be available in all counties. This will require funding to be made available for counties that do not currently have drug courts.

Sixth, among the special courts that could be considered in this legislation are courts for the homeless. Many times, the homeless suffer from addictions and are often charged with other crimes that are considered “crimes of being homeless”. The courts in Denver, Colorado, for example, hold courts for the homeless in shelters about once a month. The penalties for the crimes of being homeless are usually things like drug treatment, assistance with housing, mandated job training, and other things that should help get them back into the mainstream.

Seventh, transportation is a challenge in Ohio, especially in rural counties. Courts should be encouraged to partner with local transportation providers to ensure offenders can get to treatment facilities. People should not be denied treatment because they cannot reach it.

Last, bail reform is needed. The community action network believes it is important to have serious bail reform. The ability to stay out of jail while one awaits their trial should not be dependent on the amount of money in one’s pocket. If consideration is not available in S.B. 3, our network hopes it will be part of legislation in the near future.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Philip E. Cole  
Executive Director  
Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies  
140 E Town St., Ste. 1150  
Columbus, OH 43215