

June 29, 2020

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to weigh on Senate Bill 3, a bill we have been monitoring closely.

The NAACP seeks to eliminate harsh and unfair sentencing practices responsible for mass incarceration and racial disparities in the prison system. The NAACP advocates for treatment as opposed to incarceration for non-violent offenses. To that end, we the undersigned support the passage of Senate Bill 3.

People of color face disproportionate consequences at every stage of the justice system. Ohio's drug sentencing laws contribute to mass incarceration and exacerbate racial disparities. People who have suffered from drug addiction respond much more effectively to drug treatment than to felonies and prison.

Yet, far more than necessary Ohio has used felony convictions and imprisonment instead of more effective alternatives. For decades this state has had a misguided and overly punitive response to addiction, locking up people instead of addressing the root of the problem, punishing people over helping them.

According to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation, 80 percent of those incarcerated in Ohio's prison have a documented history of alcohol/and or drug abuse. Approximately, 23 percent of those entering prison did not break the law, but instead broke a probation rule. Nearly, 56,000 children in Ohio have an incarcerated parent. Immeasurable harm is needlessly being caused.

We support SB3 as a pathway to righting the wrongs of Ohio's punitive response to minor drug possession. African Americans make up 14.3 percent of Ohio's population, while representing nearly half of Ohio's prison population (21,238 according to ODRC's May monthly report). This is a clear and unfair representation that SB3 can help resolve. A yes vote on SB3 is a vote for fairness, recovery, and stability.

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President of the Cincinnati Branch of the NAACP