



ORIANA HOUSE, INC
TESTIMONY
Senate Bill 377

SUBMITTED TO THE
OHIO SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

By: James Lawrence

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Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; My name is James Lawrence and I am President and CEO of Oriana House, Inc. with over 45 years' experience in Behavioral Health Treatment Services and Community Corrections Programs. Oriana House operates residential and non-residential behavioral health treatment services and community corrections programs in many areas of Ohio. We primarily provide these services in Cuyahoga, Seneca, Summit and Washington counties as well as in the areas surrounding these counties. On any given day Oriana House provides residential services to approximately one thousand (1,000) clients and non-residential services to approximately twenty two hundred (2,200) clients. Today, I am testifying in support of transitional control and Senate Bill 377 sponsored by Senators Manning and Sykes.

ORC 2967.26 allows ODRC to establish a transitional control (TC) program, permitting an eligible inmate to be transferred to a community corrections facility up to the final 180 days of their sentence.

Inmates are screened for eligibility to participate in the transitional control program. ORC and ODRC administrative rules disqualify sex offenders, offenses of violence, excessive felony convictions, and those serving mandatory sentences from participation in TC. It is important to note that the participants in this program maintain inmate status.

The Transitional Control Program is important because:

- Inmates placed in the TC Program have a recidivism rate of 16%, compared to 31% for inmates released from prison. The University of Cincinnati found the TC program to be the most effective re-entry program in the country.
- Inmates participating in the TC program earn wages and are able to pay restitution, child support, taxes and other financial obligations as well as receive critical re-entry services like substance abuse treatment and educational and vocational training.
- Getting more eligible inmates into the TC program is a safe and effective way to reduce the prison population especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reducing the number of prison beds used by fully maximizing the use of TC, an estimated additional \$2.5 million can be saved annually.

Eliminating the judicial veto is important because:

- Allowing all eligible inmates to participate in the TC program reduces recidivism, reduces crime and makes our communities safer.
- There are 15 counties in which the judges are vetoing more than 80% of the inmates that come before them for consideration for the TC program and an additional 19 counties that are vetoing more than 50% of all eligible offenders. The statewide judicial veto rate is 46% according to FY18 data.
- Judges should not be involved in the management and movement of prison inmates. This is the responsibility of the ODRC. The ODRC manages the TC program and the movement of these inmates into the TC programs is no different than movement of inmates to a different security level or camp.

- Transitional Control is the most effective ODRC program at reducing recidivism; we should be utilizing this program every possible chance that we get.

Recidivism decreases when people get treatment. Our research-based programs address behavioral health and other issues, cognition, education, workforce development, and are **proven** to reduce recidivism. An effective tool offered by ODRC to local jurisdictions is the transitional control program. On average, the length of stay in a halfway house for transitional control (TC) inmates is about 120 days. Inmates whose participation in the TC program is vetoed by a judge will still be released from prison in 120 days. The difference is these inmates will be released with \$75 after that 120-day stay in prison without any supports, rather than reintegrating back into the community through a halfway house where TC inmates will receive critical re-entry services such as housing, employment placement, substance abuse treatment, and educational and vocational training and other life skills at no additional cost to counties or the state. The majority of these TC eligible inmates that remain in prison for the last 120 to 180 days of their sentence are released back into their local community without any supports or criminal justice supervision.

Currently, inmates released from Ohio prisons have a recidivism rate of 31%. By placing inmates in the TC Program, the recidivism rate is reduced to 16%. Utilizing TC, reduces prison crowding, saves money, and starts the offender on the path to becoming a law abiding, tax paying citizen. In contrast to offenders left to serve their final 180 days in prison, TC program participants earn wages and are able to pay restitution, child support, taxes, and other financial obligations. Allowing additional, appropriate inmates access to the transitional program will not cost the state of Ohio any additional funding. Statewide, there are currently 750 halfway house beds that are fully funded by ODRC and are available for any additional inmates placed in the TC program.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important legislation. I am happy to answer questions. Please feel free to contact me.

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