



## House Bill 166 Reagan Tokes Act Proponent Testimony

Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee: My name is Anthony Caldwell, Executive Vice President of SEIU District 1199 and I am here today providing proponent testimony on House Bill 166, the Reagan Tokes Act, on behalf of the nearly 500 Parole Officers of the Adult Parole Authority represented by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) District 1199.

First, I want to thank you and the bill sponsors Representative Kristin Boggs and Representative Rick Carfagna for your continued work on these important issues. I believe we all share a common purpose in doing everything within our God-given abilities, and by the oath we take, to make Ohio a safer place to live, work, and raise a family.

For Ohio's parole officers, I can attest there isn't a day that goes by that these brave women and men don't wake up thinking about their sworn duty to serve. Our parole officers take their role as professional law enforcement officers seriously and do everything within their authority to protect the public from violence and other crimes committed by formerly incarcerated offenders. But the system is broken.

Regan Tokes.

Rachael Anderson.

Tomika Turner.

These are three young women... daughters, sisters, a mother... whose lives were taken by violent felons being supervised by a broken Adult Parole Authority system that is under-staffed, under-resourced, and with misplaced priorities.

House Bill 166 will not bring back these women, or the countless other victims of those currently on parole in our community, but it does make considerable steps toward addressing some of the circumstances behind these violent crimes.

We commend the committee for ensuring that reentry programs through the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections include a facility for placement, like a halfway house or other residential facility equipped to managed target offenders. But placement alone is not enough, this legislature needs to have more oversight authority.

The people of Ohio would be shocked to learn how many formerly incarcerated individuals are released from prison without placement in an appropriately secure environment and often end up homeless or returning to the environment that enabled their pre-incarceration behavior.

More oversight of these placement facilities is greatly needed. Not long ago, one of our parole officers visited the halfway house where their parolee was living and you should be just as shocked as they



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were to learn that the person responsible for checking residents in and out of the halfway house was also a parolee, on another parole officer's caseload. That's a clear example of the fox watching the hen house.

We are appreciative of this committee's work to include a provision in this bill that will compel the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) and Adult Parole Authority (APA) to establish caseload and workload standards in line with the standards outlined by the American Probation & Parole Association. This is a welcome change from the lack of current standards which have led to extreme caseloads for parole officers in rural, suburban, and urban parts of the state. Those priorities were also proposed by Governor DeWine in his Executive budget and later codified by this General Assembly in the state budget.

However, with increased numbers of formerly incarcerated people being put into halfway houses and on parole supervision, that was now added even more parolees to the caseloads Ohio's parole officers have every day.

Despite the funding approved in the budget and supported by the Governor to hire additional parole officers, no new PCNs have been created and no new parole officers have added.

DeWine's Executive budget said that they would lower caseloads from 67:1 to 50:1, but I'm here to tell all of you the average caseload for Ohio's parole officers still ranges from 70:1 to 75:1 on any given day. This legislation would codify the caseload and workload standards Ohio's parole officers need to properly supervise their parolees.

We do have concerns that this could lead ODRC to reinstituting the use of the Chin Stat formula, or another weighted formula, when computing the number of cases parole officers are assigned. The number reported should reflect the total number of offenders under supervision by an individual parole officer.

Despite the work of this committee and the intent of this bill, the policies and practices currently implemented by ODRC and the APA to address high caseload levels for officers continue to include lowering the recommended supervision level and contact standards for offenders or allowing some parolees to call into an automated telephone reporting system, also known as ATR, rather than face-to-face contact with their parole officer.

You would be even more disturbed to learn that parolees with a history of violent crimes are not excluded from being placed on telephone reporting caseloads by current APA protocols. To be clear, you could be on parole for murder or another seriously violent crime and still be an eligible candidate for automated telephone reporting.

Parole officers are fiercely committed to their duty of keeping the public safe and assisting in the reentry of offenders into civilian life, but there is no substitute for in-person, face-to-face contact with Ohio's parolees to ensure they are doing everything required of them to meet the conditions of their parole.



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Parolees, especially those with a history of violence, should not be allowed to “phone it in” to obfuscate the Adult Parole Authority’s responsibility for effective supervision.

I know this committee and its members have had a lot of conversations about the use of GPS technology and has made changes intended to improve the monitoring of offenders, but one big piece missing is connecting that information with the front-line parole officers.

With several third-party providers operating their own proprietary systems, there is no real-time access to that data available to the parole officer. As the systems operate now, parole officers must first seek permission to request this information and, once approved, it can take as long as two-to-three weeks for that data to be made available to the parole officer.

With all of the technology that we have available at our finger tips, parole officers should be able to have real-time access to the GPS data of their parolees on their field officer tablets or FOTs.

In closing, we want to share our appreciation to the bill sponsors and this committee for requiring the State Criminal Sentencing Commission to establish an Offender Supervision Study Committee that will include an active parole officer. By including this provision in the bill, you are acknowledging the dignity of the work our parole officers do every day and giving them a seat at the table to advocate for way to make Ohio safer.

Ohio’s Parole Officers sincerely appreciate your attention to these issues and look forward to working with the committee to enact reforms to the Adult Parole Authority that will make our communities, and our families, safer.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today and I will do my best to answer any questions that you may have.

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