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Committees:

- Judiciary – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Veterans & Public Safety – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Government Oversight and Reform
- Health
- Insurance

S.J.R. 1 – Prohibit Involuntary Servitude as Criminal Punishment
Sponsor Testimony by Senator Cecil Thomas
Judiciary Committee
April 20, 2021

Good morning Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Joint Resolution 1, which would remove slavery and involuntary servitude as punishment for crime.

No one in the state of Ohio should be labeled a slave, even if they have been convicted of a crime. The Ohio Constitution is a document that forms the basis of our moral values as a state and is a guide for taking those values and turning them into laws. Simply put, I do not believe that slavery or involuntary servitude is something any of us value as Ohioans and it is why I believe the exception should be removed.

Since 2018, four states have made this change: Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, and most recently Tennessee. In all four states, it was an overwhelmingly bipartisan legislature and citizen vote that said “we will abolish slavery in all circumstances.” A statement like that would be powerful in telling the rest of the country who we are as Ohioans.

As we continue on making structural changes to our laws and policies, it is important that we stand together to eliminate this painful reminder of a ruinous time in the history of our country. Thank you and I am happy to answer questions.