

Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony
Senate Bill 182
Tracy Brumfield

6/14/2021

Dear Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Cecil Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Tracy Brumfield and I am a resident of Cincinnati. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 182.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tracy Brumfield. I am a native Cincinnati, as well as a formerly incarcerated individual. After my release from prison in 2013, I dedicated my life to both recovery from the disease of addiction and addressing the systemic barriers individuals face reentering society post releases. I founded a non profit, Rise Up News, that provides reentry resources and basic needs assistance locations along with first person essays, coping strategies, and a platform for others to share their stories. And I strongly support Senate Bill 182.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this critically important bill.

For over 20 years, beginning in the early 1990's, under the care of a physician, I began taking opioid pain medicine to treat debilitating migraines which started during my senior year of college, where I majored in communications. I was also on the D1 soccer team. I mention that because as an athlete, we lived pretty healthy lifestyles, i.e. regular *(at times exhausting!) exercise regimens, nutrition oversight, and no recreational drug or alcohol use.

Seeking a provider to treat my headaches, which were jeopardizing my schoolwork and athletic participation, I was referred to "The Cincinnati Headache Institute". During my very first visit, my doctor prescribed me a medication called Percocet, a narcotic pain medicine used for the onset of acute pain. And it worked, taking the medicine subdued my headaches and allowed me to do the majority of my day to day activities, but what I didn't realize was that it was also making my body dependent on the medication. Statistically, 1 in 7 people prescribed narcotic pain medication become addicted and/or dependent.

After realizing my body had become dependent, I sought treatment to get off of the medication in 2009. During my 30 day inpatient treatment, most people were there for heroin addiction. After treatment, I relapsed within 90 days (one can't undo 20+ years of use in 30 days), especially when the treatment consisted solely of cognitive behavioral therapy, and did not include medication assisted treatment - which we now understand to be evidence based best practice. I couldn't "talk my way" into getting better - or achieving long term recovery - I

needed a higher level of care which I was not educated about or offered. So when I relapsed, I relapsed by taking heroin for the first time.

Shortly thereafter, I was arrested in 2010 for attempting to intravenously use heroin in my car. While a DUI is a misdemeanor, the \$60 bag (about 1/2 gram) of heroin in my possession was a felony charge. After being arrested and processed, I was released on my own recognizance. This was important because I actually had a job interview the day after my arrest. I had been unemployed, and really needed this job to retain my residence and my car. Fortunately I got the job, and was able to keep my housing and my car. Had I been held on bond (which I doubt I would have been able to pay since I was on unemployment) I would have missed the interview and potentially become homeless.

Now that I know what is evidence-based best practice, I have successfully attained long term recovery going on 7 years. In that time, I founded a non profit that publishes a newspaper, RISE (reenter into society empowered) that is distributed in local jail facilities to connect those currently incarcerated with local community providers in the areas of healthcare, harm reduction, substance use disorder and/or mental health treatment, employment and education opportunities, advocacy, peer support, and reentry services. We also offer a platform for the voices of those whose lives have been affected by incarceration, addiction and other barriers that exclude them from opportunities to positively engage with their community to be heard. Reducing the stigma of criminal charges is critical to humanizing those who have either directly or indirectly been affected by the criminal justice system.

It is imperative that individuals remain innocent until proven guilty, and their ability to defend themselves from a place of power (not being incarcerated or detained) directly impacts the outcome of their case. For me, being released OR allowed me to start down this path to recovery and a successful career. Being incarcerated severely impedes one's ability to connect with the resources they need to adequately defend themselves. Pretrial services often determine a person's fate before they ever see the inside of a courtroom. I know from personal experience how different my life may have been had I not been released after being processed. Had I been detained, chances are I would have lost everything. And for those that are parents, being detained could result in their children flooding the foster care system, and since having a criminal conviction is not a "protected class", many still face barriers to gainful employment, housing, bank loans, and many other opportunities simply because they have a criminal record, even when that record is because they were sick and did not receive the level of treatment they needed to avoid future potential criminal behavior. Until we change the laws around bail, the citizens of our community will continue to be incarcerated at what we know are alarming rates. 90% of incarcerated individuals will eventually return to their community; if we make it exponentially more difficult for them to reintegrate back into society, unfortunately the cycle of criminal behavior and recidivism rates will continue to increase accordingly.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.