

Senate Judiciary Committee  
Proponent Testimony  
SB 182

Testimony of Wendy Tarr, Director  
Vincentian Ohio Action Network  
June 16, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Wendy Tarr. I am the Executive Director of The Vincentian Ohio Action Network (VOAN). VOAN was formed in 2015 by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization that enables its members to live out the values of their faith and grow spiritually through person-to-person service to the needy and the suffering utilizing thousands of volunteers throughout a 22 county region.

VOAN works with low-income people and those impacted by incarceration with two main programs -- Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope (ARCH) and the Think Tanks on Poverty. I believe SB 182 is an urgent and overdue reform that is necessary to uphold the dignity of the human person, to treat people with greater equity, and to improve the safety of our communities. We have seen and witnessed much of the injustice that takes place, including how low-income and people of color are disproportionately impacted by how our bail system functions in Ohio.

SB 182 takes positive steps forward in addressing this inequity by requiring courts to start from the presumption of release and the utilization of a 'means test' to determine appropriate cash bail if the judge determines that bail will be set. Evidence has also shown that people of color routinely receive higher cash bail amounts and serve longer time in pretrial detention than their white counterparts<sup>1</sup>. Setting cash bail based on a specific proportion of one's means test would help to change this discrimination.

Avoiding pretrial detention for people who do not pose a threat to public safety is imperative, as pretrial detention has been proven to have many negative consequences for defendants. Pretrial detention can cause individuals to lose jobs, custody of children, and housing. Research also shows that pretrial detention has negative effects on trial outcomes, including "those who are held pretrial are four times more likely to be sentenced to prison than defendants released prior to trial"<sup>2</sup> and that those held pretrial are more likely to plead guilty to avoid more jail time. The current cash bail system allows those who can afford bail to avoid jail while forcing the poor to accept consequences that could exacerbate their current situation.

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<sup>1</sup> ACLU Smart Justice Ohio, Impact, ACLU of Ohio (2018) available at <https://www.ohbailreform.com/impact/>

<sup>2</sup> Adureh Onyekwere, How Cash Bail Works, Brennan Center for Justice (February 24, 2021) available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-cash-bail-works>

Our organization sees this change as part of our work to advance a more just and fair system that is focused on evidence-based solutions that advance public safety. We believe with this change we can do both. I urge your support.

Thank you,

Wendy Tarr  
Executive Director, Vincentian Ohio Action Network

