



STATE SENATOR
JOE SCHIAVONI

33RD DISTRICT

**Senate Finance Committee
Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 297
June 5, 2018**

Good afternoon Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 297, which provides needed funding to protect the correctional officers of Ohio.

Correctional officers are tasked with overseeing and protecting those individuals deemed too dangerous to remain in society, yet the state is not currently providing all the safety equipment needed to do this dangerous job. With Ohio's growing prison population and overcrowding issues, these officers are now at even greater risk. Between 2005 and 2016, Ohio's prison population grew by over 15% leaving Ohio prisons at 132% capacity.

This past year, two inmates at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility stabbed corrections officer, Matthew Matthias, at least 30 times. When I heard about this tragedy, I was astonished to find out that the state was not already equipping our officers with the safety equipment they need.

The bill is simple and creates the Safety Equipment Fund with a \$4 million transfer from the General Revenue Fund for the purchase of stab proof vests. If agencies need additional funding to protect their workers, this legislation would allow them to get it from this fund. The vests could be purchased for the use of correction officers employed by the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, county jail deputies, and any other public employee whose job responsibility involves the security and management of persons held in custody. The agency that employs the correctional officers would apply for a noncompetitive grant through the Department of Public Safety. This funding will not be needed every year and is something that should already be provided to ensure the safety of our public employees.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important issue. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions.