**Patricia Perry**

Testimony in Support of SB 66

Feb 20, 2018

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, and the Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding SB66. My name is Patricia Perry. I am a community leader in Newark, Ohio where I am active with the Newark Think Tank on Poverty, a group affiliated with the Vincentian Ohio Action Network. I also volunteer with The Addicts Parents United, which is a support and advocacy network for parents because my son has struggled with addiction for 8 years. I have spent years volunteering my time helping people who need treatment or detox try to navigate the system to get help.

I have seen this disease and how it impacts individuals, families and whole communities. This is why I wanted to come here today to testify about SB 66 because I believe Ohioans should have better access to treatment -- inpatient long term treatment -- instead of prison.

Back in 2008, my son was sent to prison with an F5 nonviolent theft charge (related to his addiction to crack). He was let out on judicial release to community control, after completing LMCCC (in Licking County). After having two years clean, I found that was using heroin. The parole officer arrested him for his drug use. I wrote to the judge, begging him to send my son to treatment to get help. The judge denied my request and instead sent him to back to prison for the remainder of his year sentence (approx. 159 days), without any treatment or transitional housing options. Being a nonviolent crime with so little time left- ODRC released him out to a transitional program that helped with his employment, but not his addiction. He got dope as he walked from the transitional release site to work. After his release, he just began using more and more.   He was worse after his release than before.  I hope this bill results in more judges sending our children to programs that are centered on treating their addictions with the proper supervision and support – not sending them back to prison when they relapse. This is a chronic disease where relapse is common. Our society will be safer, and our children healthier and less likely to commit crimes, when addictions and their underlying issues are treated.

SB 66 also addresses the cycle that sends people back to prison for lengthy time periods when they have a technical violation of their parole. Someone I know in our community was released on community control after serving his time in prison. In our area, the parole office is in another town. Many people do not have transportation to get there. My friend has been rearrested several times for failure to report because he did not have a ride to the parole office. There is no public transportation in Newark. Sending him back to incarceration for an issue he had limited ability to control does not help anything. It just disrupts his reentry process and wastes taxpayer dollars. While SB 66 doesn’t fully fix this issue, it does stop the presumptive return to prison for repeat technical violators and reduces the time one can serve from 9 months to 90 days.

Finally, I am extremely thankful SB 66 expands opportunities for people with criminal histories, like my son, to seal their records. Our children and our loved ones need resources and support to have their diseases treated ***and*** the ability to reintegrate healthily back into the community. We know that addiction is a brain disorder, and a disease. It’s time we start addressing it as such. This includes giving people a real chance to rebuild their lives through expanded record sealing. This bill will improve job opportunities and housing options for thousands of Ohioans who have committed low level, nonviolent offenses often related to addiction by giving them an increased opportunity to seal their records.

I hope the legislature will continue to make changes that will improve the system’s response to individuals who need support and treatment. SB 66 is an important bill that moves us in that direction. Thank you for your work on this issue and I hope this legislation is successful.

Thank you.