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Services, Inc. - Cleveland

Community Corrections Association, Inc -  
Youngstown

Community Correctional Center,  
Talbert House -Lebanon

Community Restoration Centers of Stark  
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Community Transition Center - Lancaster

CROSSWAEH CBCF, Oriana House, Inc. -  
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Judge Nancy R. McDonnell CBCF,  
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Ohio Link Corrections & Treatment, Inc. -  
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Turtle Creek, Talbert House - Lebanon

Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana -  
Cincinnati, Dayton, Mansfield, Toledo

# HOUSE BILL 403

## PROPONENT TESTIMONY

### SUBMITTED TO THE

## OHIO HOUSE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

**By: Andrew Roberts**

**2020**

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee; I am Andrew Roberts, Chief Operating Officer of Volunteers of America Ohio and Indiana with 30 years of experience in the human services and criminal justice field. VOA Ohio and Indiana have programs all over Ohio (Aurora, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton) and Indiana. We operate shelters, senior living centers, thrift stores, and halfway houses. I have graduate degrees from Harvard and the Florence Keller School of Social Welfare. I am a father, a husband, and I have been in recovery for 30 years. Programs like the one I testify in favor of today gave me the foundation and support to become a successful and contributing citizen. I am also a member of the Ohio Community Corrections Association (OCCA). OCCA represents 39 nonprofit residential reentry treatment facilities, also called halfway houses, and community based correctional facilities (CBCFs). There are 18 CBCFs in Ohio, OCCA represents 5. Today, I am testifying in support of transitional control and House Bill 403 sponsored by Representatives Hillyer and Galonski.

Ohio Community Correctional Programs; including Halfway Houses, CBCFs, and Community Corrections Act Programs provide effective treatment sanctions while assuring for accountability and public safety. Through an efficient allocation of taxpayer resources based on sound evidence-based practices, Ohio has made significant steps forward to reduce costs and improve public safety. Our clients are much more likely to have mental illness or substance use disorders than the general population. In fact, according to the Brennan Report "...79% of today's prisoners suffer from either drug addiction or mental illness, and 40% suffer from both." In Ohio, the result is a prison system with ten times as many mentally ill inmates as there are patients in the six psychiatric hospitals in our state.

Recidivism decreases when people get treatment. Our research-based programs address behavioral health and other issues, cognition, education, workforce development, and are **proven** to reduce recidivism. An effective tool offered by ODRC to local jurisdictions is the transitional control program. ORC and ODRC administrative rules disqualify sex offenders, offenses of violence, excessive felony convictions, and those serving mandatory sentences from participation in TC. On average, the length of stay in a halfway house for transitional control (TC) inmates is about 120 days. Inmates whose participation in the TC program is vetoed by a judge will still be released from prison in 120 days. The difference is these inmates will be released with \$75 after that 120-day stay in prison without any supports, rather than reintegrating back into the community through a halfway house that would offer services such as housing, employment placement, substance abuse treatment, and educational and vocational training. The majority of these TC eligible inmates that remain in prison for the last 120 to 180 days of their sentence are released back into their local community without any supports or criminal justice supervision.

Data suggests that, after applying the ODRC criteria, we are sending the right offenders through transitional control, as evidenced by the low recidivism rate. Currently, inmates released from Ohio prisons have a recidivism rate of 31%. By placing inmates in the TC Program, the recidivism rate is reduced to 16%. Utilizing TC, reduces prison crowding, saves money, and starts the offender on the path to becoming a law abiding, tax paying citizen. In contrast to offenders left to serve their final 180 days in prison, TC program participants earn wages and are able to pay restitution, child support, taxes, and other financial obligations. In addition, TC inmates receive critical re-entry services like housing, employment placement, substance abuse treatment, and educational and vocational training and other life skills at no additional cost to counties or the state. Allowing appropriate inmates access to the transitional

program will not cost the state of Ohio any additional funding. Statewide, there are currently 750 halfway house beds that are fully funded by ODRC and are available for any additional inmates placed in the TC program.

We served 3,345 inmates on TC last year, according to the most recent data available, we could have served another 1,131 people. We could do so much more by integrating persons and reunifying families as opposed to having them incarcerated, released without supervision and twice as likely to return to a prison setting.

Thank you for your time today, I am happy to answer questions. Additional questions may be directed to:

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#### Endnotes/References

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/how-many-americans-are-unnecessarily-incarcerated> page 8