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JUVENILE JUSTICE COALITION

Testimony Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on SB 256, February 17, 2020

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Tammy Fornier-Alsaada and I am a resident of Columbus, Ohio. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 256.

Working with system-involved youth for several years, I would like to share my support of SB 256. Our juvenile justice system was designed with adults in mind and this bill considers the realities of youth who have found themselves with nothing to face except the reality of their mistakes. Each and every one of these children, despite their mistakes, deserve the opportunity to lead a fulfilled life, particularly after they have served their sentence. They deserve to be restored as full citizens, and allowed some hope and to dream beyond the punitive repercussions they must face within Ohio's juvenile justice system.

Children make mistakes, head down wrong paths, and sometimes find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. We must consider the whole person, the child who was often a product of his or her environment, and who often lacked the cognitive function to reason as an adult should. We must believe in our young people. We must believe that our children can be rehabilitated and lead productive lives despite their mistakes.

In working directly with youth, they have shared with us their hopelessness about this broken system. They see a system that directs them to a point of no return, and that doesn't see them as a whole person who has often had to navigate poverty and trauma often magnified with other hardships.

Aside from the moral obligation to support the rehabilitation of individuals to lead a fulfilled life consider, too, the unnecessary expense to maintain them for a lifetime. Ohio's prisons are unsafe and overcrowded. The prisons themselves are costly and so are the consequences of incarceration. Instead, we must invest in our communities, and create opportunities for our youth that are centered in our communities and evidence-based.

In closing, I would like to encourage the Committee to help restore those young people who made mistakes as children and to consider their unique circumstances at every possible moment.