

Senate Bill 377
Proponent Testimony
Submitted to the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
By: Kirk Shenay, December 2020

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; I am Kirk Shenay, a Cognitive Behavioral Specialist at Alvis, Inc., a nonprofit human services agency in Ohio. I am also a Certified CDCA (Chemical Dependency Counselor Assistant) and I am a past participant of the Transitional Control (TC) program.

Today, I am testifying in support of the Transitional Control program and Senate Bill 377 sponsored by Senators Manning and Sykes.

As a Cognitive Behavioral Specialist at Alvis, my role is to facilitate group treatment sessions designed to help our clients to change the way they think, which helps them to change the way they act. Cognitive behavioral treatment has been proven to be effective in reducing the likelihood that an individual will recidivate (return to the justice system after committing a new crime or serious violation of the terms of release).

Alvis provides reentry services, substance abuse and mental health treatment services, and workforce development services in Ohio that are designed to help individuals successfully reenter the community after spending time in the justice system. The agency also provides family support services and services to individuals with developmental disabilities. I work at the Alvis location on South Front Street in Columbus, Ohio. I have been working here for a year and a half now. I truly love what I do and have a passion for those who have been written off or deemed unsuitable for society.

This is because at one point, I was in their shoes and had the same thoughts my clients now have. No, I wasn't always a man driven to help individuals change and to try to find the words that can potentially unlock the purpose laying dormant in the lives of those I work with and encourage every day.

I spent six years of my life behind bars. These were a period when a great transformation took place. I began to look at my thinking and evaluated my life. What I realized is the person I valued so much was the same person that got me six years of my life incarcerated.

I began to change the man I valued and saw in the mirror from the inside out. I broke off the chains of the prisoner "street mentality" mindset and began to redefine what was valuable to me. This helped me to unlock potential that had lain dormant in me all my life. I had a mentor, a man of God whom I walked with for the last two years of my incarceration. He instilled in me and taught me principles that changed my thinking forever.

As a person on Transitional Control status, I was able to come to the Alvis halfway house more than five years ago to complete my sentence. I am very grateful that the Transitional Control program allowed me time to adjust to being back in the community.

Being at Alvis was truly a blessing. I had the opportunity to learn how to create a resume, obtain job skills training, and learn how to conduct myself in an interview. I was also employed and worked two jobs, one as a janitor at a gym, and the other as a cook.

The biggest blessing for me was how much Alvis helped me when it came to getting custody of my son. My son was taken from me by Children's Services while I was incarcerated. When I got out on Transitional Control status, Alvis provided so many resources to make it possible for me to get out and get custody of my son. My case manager even worked with the case worker from Children's Services to make it possible for me to be able to spend time with my son so we could begin building a relationship. Because of this help, I was able to get custody of my son upon completing the Alvis program.

One man who was really a blessing to me was Harry Cox, the Cognitive Behavioral Specialist at Alvis assigned to work with me during my time on Transitional Control. I would tell him, "One day I'm going to sit where you sit," and he encouraged me to continue down this path and doors would open for me.

Today I am sitting in that seat that I had promised so many I would. The door that came open was from the hand of the man who encouraged me to stay on the path. I am currently in college and now voluntarily go into prisons to speak to people who are in the same position I once was. I teach the Bible and how to get free from drugs and the lies that have created a path to destruction for the people who are currently in prison.

While I was on Transitional Control, Alvis equipped me with tools to be successful and encouraged me to not just have a "Get Out Plan" but also a "Stay Clean Plan." Today, as a Cognitive Behavioral Specialist at Alvis, I teach these concepts and many others in my cognitive behavioral treatment groups. Some of the individuals I teach have been in prison for as little as 12 months, whereas others have spent an extensive amount of time behind bars. Both from my personal and professional experience, I can see how much good it does for people to have time in a halfway house before they fully transition back to the community.

I hope you vote to remove barriers that may prevent people from being able to participate in the Transitional Control program that was so beneficial to me. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have gone through the Alvis program as part of my release on Transitional Control. It was such a blessing then and it continues to this day, as I am thankful to be a part of an organization that is turning lives around every day.

If you have questions, please contact me at Kirk Shenay, c/o Alvis, Inc., 40 W. Long Street, Columbus, Ohio, 43215 or by email at Kirk.Shenay@alvis180.org.