



State Representative Tavia Galonski

District 35

Sponsor Testimony, H.B. 699

House Criminal Justice Committee | November 29, 2022

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland, and my colleagues on the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony in support of House Bill 699 along with my joint sponsor, Representative Seitz.

HB 699 makes a multitude of changes to Ohio's criminal law, related to topics including but not limited to judicial release procedures during a state of emergency, civil protection orders, record sealing and expungement for certain offenses, earned credit expansion for individuals who actively participate in and complete prison programming, transitional programming for individuals transitioning out of the control of the Department of Youth Services, and the enhancement of penalties for individuals convicted of OVI offenses.

As my joint sponsor has mentioned, this legislation serves as the companion bill to Senate Bill 288, which has received a number of hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee since its introduction earlier this year. While SB 288 made its way through the committee hearing process and while the legislature went into recess, we spoke with a number of stakeholders and interested parties in order to develop what we believe is a bill that addresses many concerns that were brought forth over the last few months. The substitute bill is still a work in progress, but we plan to present it for your consideration in the near future.

One portion of the bill in particular that I would like to call to your attention deals with transitional control, a step-down program administered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). Under this program, eligible inmates are transferred to a structured halfway house for up to the final 180 days of their sentence. Inmates in these programs have the ability to work jobs and receive mental health and substance abuse treatment while they reside in the halfway houses, allowing them to better re-integrate into society.

While transitional control facilities do reduce instances of overcrowding in prisons, they also have been found to reduce recidivism rates among those who participate in the program, according to a joint research report by ODRC and the University of Cincinnati. This means that offenders transferred to transitional control are less likely to re-offend once their sentence is complete.

Currently, the Ohio Revised Code bars ODRC from transferring inmates to any transitional control program if the sentencing court does not approve of the transfer within a given period of

time. In the aforementioned substitute version of House Bill 699, this 'judicial veto' provision will be modified so that it applies only in cases where a prisoner is serving a term of one year or less. This modification is supported by the Ohio Community Corrections Association, one of many organizations whose input has been invaluable to our work on this bill.

House Bill 699 seeks to promote the utilization of transitional control programs in Ohio, as they will save money, reduce recidivism rates, mitigate the issue of prison overcrowding, and set inmates up for brighter futures as working, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens once they have served their time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation that will make much-needed changes to Ohio's criminal justice system. At this time, we are happy to answer any questions that you may have.