

House Infrastructure and Rural Development Committee

House Bill 101 – Proponent Testimony

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Chairman Stoltzfus, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brown and Members of the House Infrastructure and Rural Development Committee. My name is Ryan Kidwell. I am Captain and serve as the Jail Administrator for Sheriff Michael E. Heldman, Hancock County. I am here today both as a Jail Administrator and as a Committee Member of the Community Corrections Committee representing the Buckeye State Sheriff's Association. Serving as a Jail Administrator in one of Ohio's full-service jails and having been in Corrections for the past twenty-nine years, I want to take a moment to talk about House Bill 101.

Conceptually we would like to express our support for House Bill 101 as a remedy to a problem that has existed in Ohio's jails. However, we would respectfully request that additional discussions and revisions be considered in providing for long term solutions specific to the replacement and renovation of our aging county jails. We are willing to work collaboratively with the committee and offer our practitioner expertise to better understand the inner workings of the language, each other's roles in application of the language and in reaching a long-term solution that has forever lasting impact. We are grateful to the Ohio House Representative sponsors and co-sponsors for bringing this legislation forward.

Like today's criminal justice system, Ohio's county jails have become overwhelmed. Today's inmate requires more upon the inception of incarceration and even more at that specific moment in time when they are released back into the community. Ohio's county jails historically have faced many adversities but who would have ever thought the day would come when county jails would become stabilization units for those with mental illness, facilities for those who have been overpowered by substance use disorder in battling the ever-crippling opioid epidemic and illegal drug use, facilities for those who have been victims of a multitude of traumas to include verbal, physical, sexual and those who have been victims of human trafficking, or that we would witness a continual and ever-increasing female population that brings a very different, unique and diverse set of needs. Ohio's jails were not constructed to properly address the needs of today's jail populations.

Approximately one third of Ohio's eighty-four full service, regional and minimum-security county jails were constructed and opened prior to 1988, which was at a time when incarceration rates varied greatly from today's incarceration rates. This was also at a time when the needs of those incarcerated varied greatly from those incarcerated today. Twenty-four hour a day, three hundred and sixty-five day a year operations have taken a toll on Ohio's aging county jails. The majority of these jails have outlived their life span. Ohio's county jails by their nature are faced with continued costly updates and repairs to the structural, mechanical and operating systems in maintaining a safe and secure facility while protecting the community the jail serves.

Serving as the Jail Administrator in Hancock County I can attest to the needs of renovation and construction of jail. Our ninety-eight bed jail opened in the spring of 1989. By current design we are a traditional liner jail and indirect in contact with our inmates, meaning we are always separated by some type of barrier or backup officer. We have cell blocks that are positioned on the second floor of our Sheriff's Office that have single bunked cells with steel doors, common cell block day rooms and a couple of small open single bunk dormitories. Our furnishings are steel, concrete, stainless steel and bullet proof. Based on this design it is considered maximum security and is very movement restrictive. We lack programming space, medical, mental health and substance use beds and clinical treatment areas. Our jail has been experiencing overcrowding since 1999. Prior to the COVID pandemic we were housing an average of 129 inmates daily, contracting an average of 25 housing beds out of county in three counties and at times up to five outside counties. Annual outside housing cost averaged nearly \$500,000 above our operational budget and did not include transportation or deputy cost.

The Hancock County Justice Center continues to age, requiring costly repairs and upkeep. With jails being specialized by design and requiring very specific operational products, initial and replacement costs continue to increase overtime. Unlike a majority of Ohio counties, I consider Hancock County to be fortunate as our county commissioners, through available finances over the course of the last fifteen years, have been able to assist in facility up keep. However, what makes House Bill 101 a very important piece of legislation is that it is not just about Hancock County, it is about all Ohio counties, some of which have a very dire and emergent financial need for funding specific to jail replacement or renovation. To name a few of our projects that other jails are likely facing have included domestic water boiler replacement, heat boiler replacement, air chiller unit replacement, fire alarm system replacement, replacement of all exterior cell windows, replacement of all interior sliding doors and the operational mechanics, replacement of door controls, replacement of radios and radio console, interior facility painting, replacement of all plumbing fixtures, repair and replacement of multiple drain lines switch from cast to PVC, adding of structural ties and supports to non-security, non- load bearing walls due to facility design issue, application of outdoor recreation specialized floor coating due to leaking through walls and ceiling facility design issue, steel roof repair and painting, exterior gutter repair and replacement, exterior lighting upgrades, security camera upgrades, security lock upgrades, kitchen equipment replacement and laundry equipment replacement. Some of the above items have been replaced twice or more based on the fact we are a twenty-four hour a day operation.

As stated earlier the times have changed, people have changed and those we incarcerate have a greater need than those we have incarcerated in the past. In serving today's jail population facilities must be more specialized in new jail construction and jail renovation so that we can better focus on the housing and managing needs of the mentally ill, those with substance use disorder, those who have been exposed to trauma and human trafficking and the increasing female population. With recent changes in legislation keeping low level, non-violent felons back in the local community, it is realized by Ohio county jails that with this change we too will have to change by adding specialized programming, case management, discharge planning to lessen jail recidivism while increasing utilization of evidence-based screening tools that help us to better determine individual programming needs, increase success once released and ultimately reduce crime, to name a few.

House Bill 101 will help create a funding mechanism to address the needs of the county jails at a very critical time. Helping to overcome capacity challenges and increase inmate needs we as Jail Administrators can assist our Sheriff's and our counties more effectively manage and maintain the safety and security of our employees, those incarcerated, our facilities and the communities which we serve.

Chairman Stoltzfus, and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify in conceptual supporting House Bill 101. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.