

SENATE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT
& REFORM COMMITTEE

PROPONENT TESTIMONY
SB 204

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NOVEMBER 18, 2015

Good morning Chairman Coley, Vice Chairman Seitz, Ranking Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. My name is Cary Williams, I am the Executive Director of NorthWest Community Corrections Center, and a member of CorJus, Inc. CorJus is a professional association which represents ten publicly operated Community Based Correctional Facilities (CBCFs) across Ohio. I appreciate this opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 204.

The first CBCF in Ohio dates back to 1978 and was established to be locally controlled. CBCFs house certain felony offenders who receive education, job training and substance abuse treatment during the term of their sentence. Today, CBCFs serve all 88 counties across Ohio and provide treatment to nearly 7000 offenders each year. An overwhelming majority of those offenders have been convicted of drug related crimes, which currently carry mandatory driver's license suspensions, regardless of whether a vehicle was involved in the commission of those crimes. These mandatory suspensions can lead to a variety of negative consequences including loss of employment, inability to meet the terms of probation and treatment appointments, and causing additional strain on prosocial family bonds.

Research has shown time and again, the ability to maintain gainful employment is paramount to an offender's hope of living a prosocial lifestyle. Judges around the state utilize their discretion whenever possible to place offenders on probation, which allows the offenders who are currently employed to retain that employment. Unfortunately for those offenders convicted of a drug offense, the judge does not currently have the discretion to help them retain their ability to get to their place of employment. The inability of the offender to have a dependable method of transportation can often times lead to termination of employment. CBCFs work diligently to help offenders find employment upon release. When an offender is still serving a license suspension, these jobs typically do not last due to the offender not showing up. A lack of employment leads to an inability to pay fines, which ultimately leads to a probation violation and results in their likely return to prison or community control.

This lack of dependable transportation can also cause offenders to miss probation and treatment appointments in the community. Offenders who are unable to attend these court-ordered appointments will receive technical violations. These, technical violations are not only detrimental to the individual, but Ohio has an ever-increasing prison population, a large percentage consisting of probation violators. Many CBCFs collaborate with their courts to develop outpatient programs which utilize evidence-based practices. Our judges utilize those programs to keep offenders out of prison and in the community. Unfortunately, those offenders are often unable to attend the programs because of a lack of transportation.

When an offender loses their driver's license as a result of a drug conviction, they often struggle to find new means of transportation. Offenders in Ohio's rural counties, where no consistent or available public transportation exists, must turn to family and friends, if they have them. This can cause undue stress on offenders and their families and can ultimately lead to reoffending.

In conclusion, I/CorJus believes SB 204 takes the necessary steps to provide the courts the discretion needed when it comes to driver's license suspensions for drug-related crimes. Enabling this discretion allows the courts to utilize all information to make the best decision for the offender and the community. If the court takes the initiative to keep the offender in the community as research dictates, we must do our best to utilize policy that allows the offender to succeed.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.