

The Ohio Neighborhood Safety, Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Amendment

A 2018 Ballot Initiative Campaign



BACKGROUND

Ohio is faced with two crises: the prison system is bloated, costly and ineffective; and the drug addiction epidemic is worsening. Despite repeated attempts at reform, Ohio's prison system remains crowded, costing the state \$1.8 billion annually, with too many people returning to communities unprepared and likely to recidivate.

Despite evidence that incarceration is particularly ineffective for people struggling with addiction, roughly 1,500 people are incarcerated annually in Ohio for drug possession offenses. Moreover, more than 4,000 people enter prison for minor violations of the terms of their county probation, many of whom were placed on probation for drug-related offenses.

A diverse group of advocates and leaders have joined together to advance justice reform and help Ohio better address the cycle of addiction and crime. Ohio Organizing Collaborative, Alliance for Safety and Justice, Ohio Justice and Policy Center, and the Ohio Transformation Fund began collaborating in 2016 on reform advocacy. After working together to advance reforms through the legislative and budget process, they teamed up to craft an amendment and launch a statewide ballot initiative campaign. They aim to place the measure before Ohio voters in November 2018.

THE AMENDMENT

The **Neighborhood Safety, Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Amendment** aims to reduce imprisonment for low-level, nonviolent drug offenses and probation violations; expand rehabilitation; and reallocate prison spending to diversion, drug treatment and victim services.

The amendment is likely to have a significant impact on over-incarceration in Ohio. Currently, roughly 23 percent of the annual admissions into state prison are for probation violations, and roughly one in eight people in state prison on any given day are there for a drug possession conviction. Early analysis of the potential population impact indicates that the measure should be able to reduce the annual prison population by about 10,000 people, possibly more. That could **save roughly \$100 million dollars annually** in the state prisons budget—money that will be used for treatment and other desperately needed strategies to help communities struggling with addiction and crime.

The measure will stop wasting resources on bloated prisons and go a long way toward helping Ohio build a more effective, fair and balanced approach to public safety and community health.

Core elements of the Neighborhood Safety, Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Amendment include:

RECLASSIFYING NON-VIOLENT, LOW-LEVEL DRUG OFFENSES

Prison isn't the place for people who are simply addicted to drugs. The amendment will reclassify 4th and 5th degree drug possession felonies to misdemeanors, ensuring that those addicted to drugs get treatment.

Reclassification will also be retroactive with judicial discretion, so that people currently in prison for possession-only offenses can be released, and people who have already served their sentences can have their records changed.

ENDING PROBATION TO PRISON PIPELINE

23% of people coming to Ohio's prisons each year (about 4,700 people annually) are there for probation violations that are not new crimes. The amendment will prohibit prison sentences for probation rule infractions that are not new criminal offenses.

Probationers who violate their supervision rules will still be held accountable, but the response will reflect the seriousness of the violation.

INCENTIVIZING PERSONAL REHABILITATION IN PRISON

People in prison will be able to earn days off of their sentence for participation in appropriate substance abuse treatment, substance abuse education programming, or individualized release planning for reentry to prevent recidivism. Murderers, rapists and child molesters will not be eligible.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY HEALTH

The first three reforms will safely and significantly shrink Ohio's prison population. The amendment will then redirect the savings into treatment and support programs for youths and adults—thus further improving safety and decreasing the prison population. Some of these funds will also go to victims of crime in underserved populations.

After drafting the measure, Ohio Organizing Collaborative collected more than 2,000 signatures to submit it to the Ohio Ballot Board for approval. In December, the Ballot Board unanimously approved the measure's language and certified that it met the single subject rule requirements. Signatures are now being collected from Ohio voters to qualify for the November 2018 ballot.

THE CAMPAIGN

THE MEASURE IS POPULAR

Confidential public opinion research shows strong support among Ohio voters and across party lines, as well as race, gender, age and geographic demographics.

WE ARE BUILDING BROAD SUPPORT

The campaign team has already gathered a strong list of diverse backers, including law enforcement leaders, along with dozens of faith-based groups and grassroots organizations that work with formerly incarcerated individuals and people recovering from addiction.

NEXT UP— SIGNATURE GATHERING AND GET OUT THE VOTE

The full signature collection campaign launched in February. Once it qualifies in July 2018, the campaign team will engage in high impact media and communications, direct voter outreach and endorsement collection. The campaign strategy is to demonstrate strong bipartisan support and strong support from law enforcement and diverse constituencies—rural and urban, faith and business, and grassroots and elected officials.

We look forward to additional discussion with you about this exciting campaign. For more information, contact Amanda Hoyt at amanda.hoyt@gmail.com or visit ohorganizing.org/safeandhealthy.

Thank you!