

Ohio Justice Reinvestment Ad Hoc Committee Kicks off Review of Criminal Justice System

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— At its first meeting today, the bipartisan inter-branch Ohio Justice Reinvestment Ad Hoc Committee of the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission began examining a number of issues facing the state’s criminal justice system. Today’s meeting marks the beginning of a process aimed at addressing the impact of violent crime and opioids while enhancing public safety. The effort is also focused on improving Ohio’s approach to reducing recidivism and managing the number of people in prison and on probation and parole.

Introductory analysis of these issues was presented by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, a nonprofit organization that provides practical, nonpartisan, research-driven strategies and tools to increase public safety and strengthen communities. The CSG Justice Center is working with Ohio as it participates in the federal Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

The Ad Hoc Committee was formed under the auspices of the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission (Commission) and will propel this next phase of the State’s criminal justice reform. The effort will build on the consensus-driven platform of the Commission and ensure Ohio’s commitment to the development of policies, practices and legislative criminal justice reforms that maximize public safety, reduce recidivism and wisely spend tax resources.

Michael Buenger, Administrative Director of the Supreme Court of Ohio kicked off the meeting by addressing the committee and stressing the importance of this effort. “The next phase of criminal justice reform will explicitly focus on what is happening before prison, or in other words, the system’s “front end”, where many decisions are made that impact both future judicial and corrections practices,” Buenger said.

During the initial meeting, committee members and CSG Justice Center staff reviewed data related to overdose deaths, violent crime, and the probation and prison populations. Overdose deaths in Ohio have increased 129 percent over the past five years, with opioid related incidents now making up the vast majority of that total. The violent crime rate in Ohio grew 6 percent between 2014 and 2016, driven primarily by an increase in aggravated assaults. People who violated probation conditions accounted for nearly one in four admissions to prison in recent years, contributing to the 9 percent growth in the state’s prison population since 2000.

Under the direction of the Commission’s Ad Hoc Committee, CSG Justice Center staff will conduct a comprehensive analysis of crime, arrest, conviction, sentencing, probation, incarceration, behavioral health, post-release control, and recidivism data, using hundreds of



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thousands of individual data records. CSG Justice Center staff will examine probation, post-release control, and incarcerated population trends; length of time served in incarceration and on supervision; statutory and administrative policies; and availability of treatment and programs designed to reduce recidivism.

“This data will provide a comprehensive look at which practices are working in our criminal justice system, and which ones aren’t,” Sara Andrews, Director of the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission, said. “The stakeholders on and working with this committee will be able to give us detailed information on what tools and resources they need to effectively carry out their duties.”

In July 2017, Ohio Governor John Kasich, Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor, Senate President Larry Obhof, House Speaker Clifford Rosenberger, and Attorney General Mike DeWine requested support from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) to explore a justice reinvestment approach to address these challenges. The CSG Justice Center will provide intensive technical assistance throughout this process by collecting and analyzing data and assisting the task force in developing appropriate policy options to help increase public safety and contain the cost of corrections. CSG Justice Center staff will also convene focus groups and lead interviews with key stakeholders in Ohio’s criminal justice system.

“I’m pleased that all three branches of state government support this important project,” DeWine said “I’m optimistic that reexamining our criminal justice system will lead to research-based policies that will be instrumental in reducing recidivism and benefiting public safety while wisely spending tax resources.”

“The justice reinvestment process will help us learn from our own experiences and those of neighboring states to strengthen our criminal justice system”, Andrews said.

The committee is expected to meet six times over the next year before delivering a final report and policy proposals to the legislature in the fall of 2018.

More than 25 states have successfully used the justice reinvestment approach to date, including Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Texas.