



To: Members of the Ohio House and Senate

Fr: Mike Brickner, Senior Policy Director, ACLU of Ohio, May 25, 2016

Re: H.B. 547—Amendment concerning the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee

Late yesterday afternoon, an amendment was added to House Bill 547, the state's mid-biennium budget review that would seriously undermine the ability of the legislature to provide accountability and transparency to our state's prison system. For many years, the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) has provided critical services, including:

- Conducting both unannounced and announced inspections of adult and youth prisons;
- Interviewing prisoners to obtain qualitative information about how prison facilities are operated and what is working well and what could be improved;
- Publishing inspection and systemic reports that provide members of the public with important information regarding how individual prisons are operating and overall issues and successes within the prison system; and,
- Holding hearings for legislators and members of the public to learn about various issues occurring within both the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and the Department of Youth Services.

The amendment would essentially reconstitute CIIC and severely curtail its ability to act as an independent and credible watchdog for our state prison system. The changes include:

- Inspections of facilities will now be discretionary rather than required;
- All inspections would require approval by the Speaker of the House, Senate President, Chairperson, and Vice Chairperson;
- The majority of members of the committee must attend inspections; and,
- This new committee may not have authority to inspect privatized prisons, as it is only authorized to inspect state prisons.

These are substantial changes to a longstanding institution. The ACLU of Ohio has grave concerns about this amendment and its negative impact on accountability and transparency for the public. Given that the state prison system is expected to have a record number of prisoners as early as July 2016, now is the time to have strong protections in place to ensure facilities are operated appropriately, yet H.B. 547 is poised to diminish those safeguards. Even if you may not share our concerns, we hope you can agree that such significant changes should not be made at the 11th hour in an omnibus budget bill that provides almost no opportunity for public discussion or thoughtful legislative consideration.

We respectfully ask members of the legislature to amend H.B. 547 to remove all changes to CIIC, and at least delay consideration of these proposals until the public can have the opportunity to understand and weigh in on them in standalone legislation. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
OF OHIO
4506 CHESTER AVENUE
CLEVELAND, OH 44103-3621
T/216.472.2220
F/216.472.2210
WWW.ACLUOHIO.ORG
contact@acluohio.org

