



OHIO JUSTICE & POLICY CENTER

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House Votes to Gut Prison Inspections as Prison Population Peaks

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Yesterday, the Ohio House of Representatives voted to disband the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC), the organization charged with inspecting prisons and Department of Youth Services facilities. House Bill 547, a budget bill passed late Tuesday afternoon, contains a last-minute amendment disbanding the CIIC and creating a scaled-back committee with no oversight of private prisons, no mandatory inspections, and that requires the agreement of several legislators before undertaking an inspection. The bill is expected to be voted on by the Senate today.

“Disbanding the CIIC will make state government less transparent, reducing oversight of the prison system at a time when overcrowding makes inspections critical,” says David Singleton, Executive Director of the Ohio Justice & Policy Center. “In the midst of record-breaking prison overpopulation, the legislature has decided to gut its ability to monitor the system responsible for the over 50,000 incarcerated prisoners and almost 500 detained youth.” The Columbus Dispatch reported earlier this month that the prison population was projected to break previous records as early as this July (<http://bit.ly/1TxtrrV>).

Disbanding the CIIC could impact the health of the wider community. Public health research out of Harvard University demonstrates the connection between Hepatitis C treatment in prisons and prevention efforts in the wider community (<http://bit.ly/1TxuDva>). The CIIC also protects the state from costly litigation by providing an early warning signal to egregious problems in both public and private prisons, as well as juvenile facilities.

“The 50,945 people in state prison today are, first and foremost, people. They have families; in fact, most of them will be released at some point and become our neighbors,” says Singleton. “We cannot turn a blind eye to their basic safety and health. We must not eliminate the accountability that the CIIC brings.”

The Ohio Justice & Policy Center is a non-profit law office working create fair, intelligent, and redemptive criminal-justice systems. Find out more at www.ohiojpc.org.

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