



Office of the Ohio Public Defender

250 East Broad Street - Suite 1400
Columbus, Ohio 43215

www.opd.ohio.gov

(614) 466-5394

Fax (614) 752-5167

TIMOTHY YOUNG
State Public Defender

To: Members of the Ohio General Assembly
From: Tim Young, Ohio Public Defender
Date: May 25, 2016
Re: HB 547 Amendment re: Correctional Institution Inspection Committee

It has come to my attention that an amendment was added to House Bill 547 to abolish the longstanding, bipartisan Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) and replace it with a partisan, significantly restricted group. I urge the General Assembly to reject this amendment.

The joint state correctional institution oversight committee created by the amendment cannot succeed and will expose Ohio to a substantial risk of litigation. Under the proposed amendment, inspections are discretionary rather than required, and must be approved by legislative leadership. The committee cannot inspect private facilities. And a majority of the members of the committee must attend each inspection. As you may recall, a prior requirement for just one member of CIIC to attend inspections greatly curtailed the ability of CIIC's staff to complete inspections, given the difficulty of coordinating inspections with legislators' schedules. CIIC's governing language had to be amended to remove the requirement that a member attend inspections, in order to allow CIIC to meet its statutory obligations.

CIIC is Ohio's best protection against a federal lawsuit regarding prison conditions. Given that the state only recent came out from under federal court management of conditions in its youth prison system, it seems ill-advised to abolish the only agency charged with monitoring conditions in adult and youth facilities.

Ohio's prison population continues to grow, with an estimated all-time high coming this summer. It is vital to the safety of prison employees and inmates that the institutions are inspected regularly, and potential problems identified and addressed as early as possible.

I urge you to remove this language from HB 547.