

Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

Sen. Nathan Manning, Chair
Statehouse, 1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

November 18, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

We, the undersigned individuals and allied organizations, wish to express our strong opposition to House Bill 289 (HB 289), specifically, the provision within the bill that would impose a 30-day registration requirement for persons who are homeless. We urge you to consider removing this provision from the bill, as it represents an undue burden on some of the most vulnerable members of our society and fails to contribute meaningfully to public safety.

While we share the goal of implementing effective, evidence-based public safety measures, we believe that the proposed 30-day transient registration requirement is not an effective public safety measure; it is both impractical and harmful, particularly for individuals who are experiencing homelessness. The logistical challenges of reporting non-fixed addresses every 30 days are profound and, in many cases, insurmountable. In addition to this 30-day period of re-registration, there is an additional provision that necessitates a 20-day advanced notice if there is going to be a change of status. What is the purpose of this? More importantly, how do either of these requirements improve public safety? For individuals who lack stable housing, reporting an address within such a tight timeframe may be impossible, placing them at risk of being penalized for noncompliance due to circumstances beyond their control.

Ohio's current laws already require individuals to report their permanent and temporary addresses in a timely manner. The current law ALSO allows county SORN administrators to take additional narrow, relevant measures to enhance how they ensure accountability. Counties such as Cuyahoga already implement more frequent registration checks for persons who are homeless and counties such as Franklin implement community notification tactics that allow for blanket verification annually. The amendment to HB289, which adds a 30-day requirement, is quite simply a solution in search of a problem.

This provision fails to acknowledge the detrimental impact of residency restrictions already in place across the state, severely limiting where individuals on the registry can live. Combined with the difficulty of finding a landlord willing to rent to someone on the sex offender registry, these factors contribute to a cycle of homelessness for many individuals who have served their sentences. Adding further reporting burdens to this population is counterproductive and, we believe, inhumane. It risks further criminalizing homelessness and exacerbating the already considerable challenges faced by people attempting to reintegrate into society. Forcing individuals to comply with such a frequent and unrealistic reporting requirement could lead to higher non-compliance rates, not because they pose

a greater risk to public safety, but because they lack the basic stability required to meet such stringent demands.

The imposition of additional, more frequent reporting requirements will not improve public safety; rather, it will create further barriers to successful rehabilitation and reintegration while robbing SORN administrators of the ability to tailor their compliance tactics to the nature of the issues in their county. There is no evidence to suggest that individuals who are unable to comply with the 30-day registration requirement due to homelessness present a greater risk to public safety. There is, however, ample data to support the fact that far too few of Ohio's counties provide for a remedy to the basic need of shelter that will meet the needs of individuals with a sexually-oriented conviction history. The notion that an individual would choose to be homeless just to alleviate the impediment caused by residency restrictions is preposterous, and a direct critique of how the registry in general has created unintended consequences that make **all of us less safe**.

In conclusion, we respectfully ask that you remove the recent amendment to HB 289 that creates a 30-day registration requirement for individuals who are homeless. We also request that this issue be dealt with through proper administrative agency guidance and elevation of best practices versus through an overreaching legislative "solution." The recently amended provision would only add complexity to an already burdensome system, increase homelessness, disproportionately burden SORN units, increase the rate of unintentional non-compliance and place unnecessary penalties on individuals who are already disadvantaged. Instead, we urge you to focus on policies that strike a balance between public safety and the fair treatment of those attempting to reintegrate into society while allowing local governments to best decide how to monitor and enforce SORN requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We are happy to provide additional information or discuss our concerns further.

Sincerely,

[Other Supporting Organizations or Individuals, if applicable]

Barbara E. Wright, Attorney Advocate

Marblehead, OH