

THE OHIO SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AMENDMENT



Ohio prisons are crowded with low level nonviolent offenders. We are in the midst of an addiction epidemic which is taking a toll on our state in money and in precious human life. Black Ohioans make up 10% of our population and 50% of the incarcerated. Imprisoning the addicted is leading to relapse and overdose in our streets. It is time to try something new. As Jews, we believe that every person holds a spark of Godliness within them and we are moving into action to give people a chance at *teshuva*- restoration and recovery.

The Amendment will do four things for Ohio:

1. Reclassify drug possession felonies as misdemeanors, because people struggling with addiction need treatment, not prison. The amendment would allow the reclassification to be done retroactively, so people currently in prison for possession-only offenses could be released, and people with past drug-possession felonies could get them reclassified, opening up opportunities for thousands of Ohioans.
2. Cut-off the probation-to-prison pipeline. Twenty-three percent of the people coming to Ohio's prisons each year (about 4,700 annually) are being sent to prison for probation violations - not new crimes. Minor violations - such as missing a meeting with a probation officer due to a work commitment - often result in prison time for people who are working to get their lives back on track. The amendment would prohibit prison sentences as punishment for probation rule infractions that are not new crimes.
3. Incentivize personal rehabilitation in prison. Data and personal stories demonstrate that safety and rehabilitation improve when people receive days off of their prison terms for participating in quality programming. The amendment would expand the ability of current inmates to earn these modest sentence reductions.



4. Invest savings in community health. The first three reforms will safely and significantly shrink the prison population. The amendment will then redirect the savings into local treatment and support programs for youths and adults — further improving safety and decreasing our state’s reliance on prisons to solve social ills.

The **Safe and Healthy Communities Amendment** will cut off the addiction to prison pipeline by reinvesting money in communities for mental health services, drug prevention and treatment rather than packing our prisons with the mentally ill and addicted. It will remove low level drug felonies that Ohioans have been branded with for many years, serving as stumbling blocks to housing, employment and basic needs. It is the only sentencing reform measure on a state ballot this fall. A coalition of diverse Ohioans touched by addiction and incarceration is mobilizing around the belief that we need to do better. Inner city communities of color who were hit by the war on drugs, rural counties being decimated by the opioid epidemic and suburban communities who have suffered in silence with addiction are moving into conversation and action together to change the way we view addiction: as a disease to be treated rather than a crime to be punished by incarceration alone.

Judaism places the highest possible value on human life. The words “to save a life is to save the entire world (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 17a)” are inscribed on our state capitol. Together, let’s enact policies to preserve and restore precious lives rather than throw them away. Reform Jews across Ohio have collected over 5,000 signatures to help certify this amendment. We will know in July whether voters will have a chance to save lives at the polls this November.

More information can be found at <http://ohorganizing.org/safeandhealthy>.