

House Judiciary Committee

HR 3026

March 6, 2023

Chairman Klemin and members of the Committee,

My name is Andrew Frobig. I am the Jail Administrator for the Cass County Sheriff's Office, and I am submitting this testimony in support of HR 3026, a resolution to study improving re-entry outcomes.

Re-entry services are a crucial component in reducing the recidivism rate in our state. For however many legislative sessions I can recall, there have been multiple efforts undertaken to address this issue, and from many perspectives. There has been legislation to modify sentencing and offense levels for crimes such as drug and drug paraphernalia possession, regrading of theft offenses, and a presumption of probation for first-offense felonies, all in an effort to reduce the negative impacts on offenders. At the same time, we have seen legislative efforts to address other crimes such as DUI with a deterrent approach, by increasing mandatory minimums or implementing mandatory monitoring programs such as the 24/7 program, and efforts during the current session in progress at increasing offense levels or mandatory minimums in other crime categories.

Still, in the law enforcement community, and especially within corrections, we continue to experience turnover of repeat offenders at an alarming rate. Further, there are identifiable trends with many of those who recidivate by committing larger and more serious offenses. From the inside, over the course of my career, I repeatedly witness individuals who accelerate on a downward spiral of addiction, possession offenses that escalate to trafficking offenses, minor thefts that escalate to burglary rings, arrest resistance that escalates to aggravated assault of medical or law enforcement professionals, minor domestics that escalate to aggravated and repeated abuse. Various stakeholders debate the proper way to address this escalating recidivism, with no discernable positive impact in the overall rates. The negative consequences of addiction continue to escalate beyond any ability or efforts to address them, the court system continues to be overburdened, and the correctional facilities are unable to keep up with demand for space.

But, in the backdrop of all of those problems, we have also seen a tremendous effort on the part of many private entities to develop and offer various supports in the areas of employment, housing, treatment, education, and other forms of care or assistance. There are positive outcomes being realized with the relatively small number of individuals who are being connected thru these services.

But, they are still a patchwork of services. We collaborate with each other, and attempt to share data, to help with informed decisions, but often this is insufficient to convince local stakeholders to fund or expand. These services often meet resistance, hesitation to support, and lack of prioritization in conversations or efforts to address crime and recidivism.

I believe this study would be crucial to help identify which of these services are achieving positive results. It will enable the collection and aggregation of data from various sources in a manner that is useful to all stakeholders. It will increase the capacity of governing bodies to make informed and fiscally responsible decisions, to understand the benefits and value of supporting and funding such efforts, and the ability to rationalize those expenses and efforts to the voting public.

Re-entry supports are a critical component if we are to have any hope of improving our criminal justice outcomes. This state would benefit greatly from taking, and funding, an evidence-based approach to these efforts – to better identify those individuals to target with services and better identify which services to provide.