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**Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 101 – Proponent Testimony**

**Ron Amstutz
Wayne County Commissioner**

January 25, 2022

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony this afternoon on House Bill 101. My name is Ron Amstutz, and I serve as a Wayne County Commissioner. It is good to be back at the Ohio Statehouse, where I served with almost all of you on this committee during my years of service as a state legislator.

I come before the committee today to discuss a pressing issue facing many Ohio counties – the replacement and renovation of aging county jail facilities. One of county government’s primary responsibilities is the administration of justice. The majority of county budgets are dedicated toward this purpose, and the operation and maintenance of the county jail is typically the largest single expense in criminal justice administration.

Many counties today rely on jail facilities that are ill-equipped to house growing inmate populations. In particular, the rise of female inmate populations places new strains on jail infrastructure. Meanwhile, the county jail increasingly serves as a de facto provider of mental health and addiction services, a role these facilities were not designed to serve.

As an example, Wayne County has an aging, undersized and outdated jail. Our jail was constructed 45 years ago. The inmate population has steadily risen over time, stretching the jail’s infrastructure.

The rise in the jail’s female population is particularly challenging. A jail originally built to hold 6 female inmates is now tasked with housing 20 to 40 females. This forces the county to house prisoners out of county and to convert cell blocks to accommodate this expanded population. This all leads to increased costs for county taxpayers.

Prior to the outbreak of Covid, we had double bunking to 120-plus, as well as others that were transported to other county facilities, mostly in Morrow and Richland counties, and we had more than 1,000 persons on probation, some of whom need the prospect of jail as an incentive to follow re-entry or diversion orders and opportunities. Insufficient jail facilities threaten public safety, the delivering of justice and the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts.



Wayne County's experience is not unique. A 2019 survey by the County Commissioners Association of Ohio and the Buckeye State Sheriffs Association identified over \$1.3 billion in needed jail construction, renovation, expansion and repairs across the state. CCAO is grateful for the \$50 million provided in the most recent capital appropriations bill for jail construction and expansion, and those funds are being put to good use across six separate projects across the state.

Wayne County applied for 50 percent of our 32.2 million project cost in this first round of funding. We were not funded, at no real surprise, given the extensive volume of needs throughout the state. What counties need most is ongoing assistance from the state to help us meet our jail facility obligations in a comprehensive and timely manner.

House Bill 101 establishes a funding formula to allocate future state support for county jail infrastructure – a methodology somewhat parallel to the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) school construction program, a formula familiar to the General Assembly. I will note that there is no appropriation attached to this bill, but it provides a road map and a vehicle that will work if appropriation fuel is also provided. CCAO is strongly supportive of both this legislation and the state capital appropriation process needed to make it work.

I won't describe the entire process prescribed process in this bill, but the formula ranks each of the 88 counties according to a combination of property tax values and taxable retail sales volume. Counties with the combination of lowest property tax values and lowest taxable sales volume would be invited first to apply for funding, to the extent that state capital funding is provided. This ranking also determines the county's portion of the basic project cost, if invited to apply. For example, if a county ranked 44th out of 88 counties, the project cost for the county would be 50 percent. A minimum state contribution floor of 25 percent is also established in this bill.

This kind of method provides greater predictability as to when counties may receive state support for their jail facilities, which also aids counties in their long-term financial planning efforts. Establishing a set formula would also provide an ongoing framework for capital jail construction – a framework that has not existed for nearly 20 years.

Ultimately, improving outdated county jail infrastructure requires a state-county partnership. The need is too great for counties to bear alone. Establishing a formula structure for this partnership is a key step in providing jail facilities that better serve those incarcerated, the employees who work there, and the communities they serve.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you have for me.