

Testimony of Dr. Reginald Wilkinson
Senate Bill 162
Proponent Testimony
October 21, 2015

Thank you Chairman Eklund, Vice Chairman Obhof, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Committee, my name is Dr. Reginald Wilkinson and I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 162.

I was appointed by Governor George Voinovich as director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) in 1991 and reappointed by Governor Bob Taft. I served in the capacity of DRC director for more than 15 years. When I retired in 2006, I was the longest serving prison director in the nation.

I began my career with the Department as a coordinator of volunteer services in 1973. During my 33 years with DRC I served as a warden's assistant at the Lebanon Correctional Institution, as director of training for DRC, as the first warden of the Dayton Correctional Institution and deputy director of prisons for the south region of Ohio.

I am a past president of the American Correctional Association, the Association of State Correctional Administrators, and the International Association of Reentry. I am a founding member of the International Association of Corrections and Prisons. I presently chair the US Department of Justice Prison Rape Review Panel and am a former chairperson and current member of the National Institute of Justice Advisory Board.

As director of DRC, I was responsible for more than 14,000 employees and an inmate population of nearly 52,000, including Ohio's death row population. I oversaw 20 executions including the very first one since the death penalty was reinstated as constitutional in 1972. Although I am now retired from the state of Ohio, I have been a corrections professional for over 42 years.

Let me be clear that I am not a physician or a mental health professional. My experience comes from leading the department through a series of reforms beginning in the 1990s that revolutionized mental health care in Ohio prisons. I have authored numerous articles (<http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/wilkinson.htm>) and appeared in an award winning documentary

on the topic of mental health treatment in prisons. I have testified in the United States Senate on the subject.

Though we have made great strides addressing mental health issues within the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, there are still areas where our laws have not advanced to adequately address the impact of serious mental illness on those we incarcerate.

I support SB 162 because I saw time and again how people with serious mental illness wind up on death row. These inmates suffered from a diverse range of impairments in cognition, emotion regulation and behavior, disorganized thinking, delusions, paranoia, exaggerated or distorted perceptions, and trouble with logical thinking. These impairments make them less culpable than someone who does not suffer from serious mental illness; they cannot, therefore, be the true “worst of the worst” and should not receive the ultimate sentence.

My 42 years of experience as a corrections professional lead me to be certain enacting Senate Bill 162 is an appropriate policy for Ohio to adopt. I am happy to answer any questions.