

May 25, 2016

**Statement from Michael Kirkman, Executive Director, Disability Rights Ohio on
the amendment to House Bill 547 to “redefine” The Correctional Institution
Inspection Committee**

As Ohio’s designated system to protect and advocate for the rights of Ohioans with disabilities, we are deeply concerned about an amendment that was added to House Bill 547 that would significantly limit the effectiveness of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC). Disability Rights Ohio urges the Ohio General Assembly to reject this amendment.

CIIC provides critical services that protect the safety and well-being of incarcerated Ohioans; one in five of whom are Ohioans with a mental illness. Indeed, Ohio’s prisons hold 10 times as many people with a mental illness as Ohio’s psychiatric hospitals. Unfortunately, Ohio’s prison system is a critical piece of the mental health care system.

CIIC is responsible for inspections of adult and youth facilities, holding oversight hearings for legislators that provide critical information, and producing reports and performing research to keep the public aware of current issues and positive reforms within the prison system.

The inspections performed by the CIIC review many aspects of the operations of the prisons. In addition to examining prison conditions, including the provision of health care, mental health treatment, and addiction services, the reviews also examine fiscal accountability, staff management, and other measures that ensure that taxpayer dollars are appropriately spent.

The last-minute amendment to House Bill 547 would make substantial changes that would impair the ability of CIIC to continue to assist in the state’s efforts to ensure a safe and humane correctional system, especially for individuals with mental illness.

As Ohio makes other critical policy decisions to improve our mental health and addiction services system, it is critical that there remains a non-partisan, independent committee that is able to perform inspections and provide unbiased data to Ohio’s policy makers on critical issues in the prison system.

Accordingly, we strongly urge the Ohio General Assembly to reject this flawed amendment and continue to support positive reforms to Ohio’s prison system.