



STATE OF WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONS OMBUDS

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**House Appropriations Transportation and Public Safety Subcommittee
House Bill 2325
February 1, 2021**

Chair Paul Krizek and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2325, which would create a corrections ombudsman for the state of Virginia. My name is Joanna Carns and I am the former Director of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee in Ohio, which performed inspections of all state prisons on a biennial basis, and the current Director of the Office of the Corrections Ombuds in Washington state, which investigates individual complaints of harm to incarcerated individuals and produce reports with recommendations for systemic improvement. House Bill 2325 appears to combine the activities of both my former and my current offices and I therefore am uniquely situated to have real insight into the operations of the new office.

I was asked to provide information specifically on the expected fiscal cost of the bill. The annual budget of my office in Ohio was approximately \$460,000. This paid for six full time staff, including myself, to inspect approximately 30 facilities (adult and juvenile) every two years. The annual budget for my current office is approximately \$1.2 million. This pays for approximately 11 positions, including myself, to respond to complaints for a system incarcerating approximately 19,000 people (including work release centers and community violators housed in prisons) in pre-COVID times.¹ On the DOC side, it requires approximately three full-time staff positions to serve as a liaison to my office, process the reports and get responses, and facilitate our records requests.

I am happy to provide more information on any aspect of this work or my experience, and to serve as a resource to the incoming Director should the bill pass. I applaud Virginia's Legislature for moving forward with this bill, as having an ombudsperson specific to corrections is incredibly important and will improve the lives of many whose voices are otherwise often silenced, with the goal of creating a more humane correctional environment that will result in reduced recidivism and increased public safety for all. Please feel welcome to reach out to me at Joanna.carns@gov.wa.gov if I can be of assistance in any way.

¹ Keep in mind the Virginia prison population pre-COVID appears to have been around 29,000.