
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTION

Illegal conveyance of weapon, drugs of abuse, or communications device

- Requires the court to impose a mandatory prison term if a Department of Youth Services (DYS) employee illegally conveys a weapon onto a detention facility.
- Requires the court to impose a mandatory prison term if a contractor or employee of a contractor providing services to the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) or DHS illegally conveys a weapon or drugs of abuse onto a detention facility.
- Increases the penalty for illegal conveyance of a communications device onto the grounds of a specified governmental facility.
- Specifies that the penalty for illegal conveyance of a communications device onto the grounds of a specified governmental facility is a felony with the imposition of a mandatory prison term, if the offender is an employee of DRC or DHS or a contractor or employee of a contractor providing services to DRC or DHS.

Electronic commitment to DRC

- Permits a court of common pleas to enter into an agreement with DRC under which persons may be electronically committed to DRC.
- Specifies that persons sentenced to DRC, or to any institution or place within DRC, must be conveyed by the sheriff initially to an appropriate facility established and maintained by DRC, or committed electronically for reception, examination, observation, and classification.
- Requires the sheriff to convey the sentenced person to DRC or electronically commit the sentenced person to DRC prior to removal of an individual on an out of jurisdiction detainer.
- Requires an offender to be committed to DRC before post-release control may be imposed.

Frederick Douglass Project for Justice

- Requires DRC to permit the Frederick Douglass Project for Justice to operate in all prisons.

Food service at Ross Correctional

- Requires DRC to create a pilot program in the Ross Correctional Institution to require the institution to utilize state employees to oversee meals and food service, to the extent that the pilot program does not conflict with existing contracts.

Mandatory drug screens at correctional facilities

- Requires every officer, employee, contractor, or employee of a contractor who is entering the grounds of a state correctional institution be subject to screening to prevent the conveyance of drugs of abuse into the institution.

Reentry housing near schools

- Prohibits DRC's Division of Parole and Community Services from licensing a halfway house, reentry center, or community residential center that operates within 500 feet of a school or child care center.

Health care coverage for a deceased correction officer's spouse

- Requires the DAS Director, on receiving notice from the DRC Director that a correction officer was killed in the line of duty, to enroll the deceased officer's surviving spouse in any health benefits offered to state employees.
- Requires DRC to pay DAS for the full cost of a surviving spouse's health benefits, including any administrative costs.
- Requires a surviving spouse to apply to DAS for health care coverage after being approved for death benefits from the Ohio Public Safety Officers Death Benefit Fund.
- Makes a surviving spouse who is a state employee ineligible for health benefits under the bill and specifies that receiving a health benefit does not make the surviving spouse a state employee.

Local jail funding

- Reestablishes DPF Fund 5ZQ0 ALI 501505, Local Jail Grants, with an appropriation of \$75 million in FY 2026, and requires those funds to be used by DRC to provide grants for county jail construction and renovation projects.
- Requires DRC to accept and review applications and designate the projects involving the construction and renovation of county jails according to the continuing guidelines originally established in H.B. 33 of the 135th General Assembly, and allows the DRC to establish guidelines for multicounty project applications.

Illegal conveyance of weapon, drugs of abuse, or communications device

(R.C. 2921.36)

The bill requires the court to impose a mandatory prison term if a DYS employee or a contractor or employee of a contractor providing services to DRC or DYS is guilty of illegal conveyance of a weapon or illegal conveyance of drugs of abuse onto the grounds of a detention facility. Under the bill, the penalty for illegal conveyance of a communications device onto the grounds of a specified governmental facility is increased from a first degree misdemeanor to a

fifth degree felony, and the penalty for a repeat violation from a fifth degree felony to a third degree felony. The bill also specifies that the penalty for illegal conveyance of a communications device onto the grounds of a specified governmental facility is a third degree felony if the offender is an employee of DRC or DYS or a contractor or employee of a contractor providing services to DRC or DYS and requires the court to impose a mandatory prison term.

Electronic commitment to DRC

(R.C. 2151.311, 2152.26, 2967.28, and 5120.16)

The bill specifies that persons sentenced to DRC, or to any institution or place within DRC, must be conveyed by the sheriff initially to an appropriate facility established and maintained by DRC, or committed electronically, for reception, examination, observation, and classification. Prior to removal of an individual on an out of jurisdiction detainer, the sheriff must convey the sentenced person to DRC or electronically commit the sentenced person to DRC. A court of common pleas is permitted to enter into an agreement with DRC under which persons may be electronically committed to DRC, and an offender must be committed to DRC before post-release control may be imposed.

The problem that this provision is intended to address is not clear. It may be that the intent of this provision is to address situations in which a person who would normally be incarcerated in a prison has instead served the time sentenced in a local jail, and has therefore not formally been committed to DRC prior to the necessity for post-release control procedures. It is unclear that the language in this provision accomplishes that goal. A clarifying amendment may be desired.

Frederick Douglass Project for Justice

(R.C. 5120.039)

DRC is required to permit the Frederick Douglass Project for Justice to register with DRC under the reentry services by nonprofit faith-based organizations framework to enter institutions under the control of DRC for the purpose of facilitating structured meetings between incarcerated people and nonincarcerated people.

Food service at Ross Correctional

(Section 751.50)

The bill requires DRC to create a pilot program in the Ross Correctional Institution to require the institution to utilize state employees to oversee meals and food service, to the extent that the pilot program does not conflict with existing contracts.

Mandatory drug screens at correctional facilities

(R.C. 5145.32)

The bill requires every officer, employee, contractor, or employee of a contractor entering the grounds of a state correctional institution be subject to a screening to prevent the conveyance of drugs of abuse into the institution. Any controlled substance, harmful intoxicant, or dangerous drug is considered a “drug of abuse” under continuing law.

Reentry housing near schools

(R.C. 2967.14 with conforming changes in R.C. 2967.26, 2967.271, and 5120.035)

The bill prohibits DRC's Division of Parole and Community Services from licensing a halfway house, reentry center, or community residential center if that halfway house, reentry center, or community residential center operates within 500 feet of a school or a child care center. A facility of this type must be licensed in order to house an offender or parolee for the period of the offender's or parolee's conditional release or post-release control.

For purposes of this provision, a "child care center" has the same meaning as under the Child Day-Care Licensing Law (R.C. Chapter 5104.) and a "school" has the same meaning as in the Drug Offenses Law (R.C. Chapter 2925.), principally any school operated by a board of education, any community school established under continuing law, or any nonpublic school for which the Director of Education and Workforce prescribes minimum standards under continuing law.

Health care coverage for a deceased correction officer's spouse

(R.C. 5120.85)

The bill requires the DAS Director, after being notified by the DRC Director that a correction officer was killed in the line of duty, to enroll the deceased officer's surviving spouse in any medical, dental, or vision benefit (a "health benefit") that DAS contracts for or otherwise provides to state employees.¹⁴⁶ The bill specifies that a surviving spouse receiving health benefits is not a state employee. Additionally, a surviving spouse cannot receive health benefits under the bill if the spouse is eligible to receive them as a state employee or enroll in the federal Medicare program.

Under the bill, DRC must pay DAS the full cost of the surviving spouse's health benefits, including administrative costs. The bill requires a surviving spouse to apply to the DAS Director for health care coverage after the spouse's application for death benefits from the Ohio Public Safety Officers Death Benefit Fund is approved by the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund Board of Trustees. The fund pays benefits to the surviving spouse, children, or, in limited cases, surviving parent, of a law enforcement officer (including a correction officer) or firefighter killed in the line of duty. Under continuing law, a spouse or child receiving benefits from the fund may elect to participate in any health benefit that DAS offers to state employees. To pay for benefits, the Board withholds the spouse's cost (an amount equal to the percentage of the cost that would be paid by a state employee for the benefits) from the spouse's death benefit payments and forwards it to DAS and pays DAS the remaining cost of the benefits and any administrative costs.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ By reference to R.C. 124.82 and 742.63, not in the bill.

¹⁴⁷ By reference to R.C. 124.824 and 742.63, not in the bill.

Local jail funding

(Sections 383.10 and 383.30)

The bill reestablishes DPF Fund 5ZQ0 ALI 501505, Local Jail Grants, which was originally established in H.B. 33 of the 135th General Assembly, with an appropriation of \$75 million in FY 2026, and requires those funds to be used by DRC to provide grants for county jail construction and renovation projects. These funds are the same that were appropriated under H.B. 33 – the projects are not complete, and as the H.B. 33 provisions expire in July, these funds are being “re-appropriated” in order to allow the projects to be completed.

DRC must accept and review applications and designate the projects involving the construction and renovation of county jails according to the continuing guidelines outlined below originally established in H.B. 33, except that it also allows DRC to establish guidelines for multicounty project applications.

Funding formula

DRC must choose which projects to fund using a funding formula that ranks counties based on sales tax and property tax revenue. TAX conducts the ranking. The ranking formula is as follows:

- First, TAX takes the total value of all property in the county listed and assessed for taxation on the tax list in the preceding tax year, and lists each county in order of total value, ascending, so that the county with the lowest value is number one on the list – its property tax ranking.
- Second, TAX ranks each county based on the estimate of the gross amount of taxable retail sales sourced to the county as reported by TAX for the preceding fiscal year, computed by dividing the total amount of tax revenue received by the county during that period from sales taxes and use taxes by the aggregate sales tax rate currently levied by the county. TAX lists each county in order of total value, ascending, so that the county with the lowest value is number one on the list – its sales tax ranking. Any county that does not currently levy sales taxes is automatically ranked at number 88 on the list.
- Then, for each county, TAX adds the numbered rank for property values to the numbered rank for sales tax, and orders the counties according to the sum of the two ranks, the county with the lowest sum being number one on the list. The percentile ranking is determined by taking the county’s ranking on this final list, dividing it by 88, and multiplying it by 100. This percentile ranking not only is used to help determine which counties to invite to apply for assistance, but also is used to determine the county’s basic share of the project cost.

For this final ranking, if two or more counties are tied, the county with the lowest population receives the lowest final ranking. The final ranking for the counties should be numbers 1 through 88.

Application process and needs assessment

Upon receiving the final rankings, DRC must select a number of the lowest ranking counties and invite the selected counties to apply for assistance. Two or more counties may apply jointly as long as at least one was invited to apply.

DRC must adopt guidelines to accept and review applications and designate projects, including guidelines requiring counties to justify the need for the project, and guidelines for multicounty project applications.

Upon a county's application, DRC must conduct a needs assessment for that county, to determine the following:

- The county's need for additional jail facilities, or for renovations or improvements to existing jail facilities, based on whether and to what extent existing facilities comply with safety and construction standards, including the age and condition of the facilities;
- The number of jail facilities to be included in a project;
- The estimated annual, monthly, or daily cost of operating the facility once it is operational, as reported and certified by the county auditor;
- The estimated basic project cost of constructing, acquiring, reconstructing, or making additions to each facility; and
- Whether the county has recently received a grant from the state to construct or renovate jail facilities.

Following the needs assessment, DRC may approve constructing, acquiring, reconstructing, or making additions to a jail facility only upon evidence that the proposed project conforms to existing construction and renovation standards, and that it keeps with the needs of the county or counties as determined by the needs assessment. Exceptions are authorized only in those areas where topography, sparsity of population, and other factors make larger jail facilities impracticable.

The funds must be awarded by July 1, 2027.

Basic project cost

The county's portion of the basic project cost is equal to 1% of the basic project cost times the percentile in which the county ranks according to the county's percentile ranking. The state's portion is the remainder, except that the state's portion is always at least 25%. If the county's portion is calculated to exceed 75%, the county's portion must be 75%. For multicounty jail facilities, if the sum of two or more counties' portions of the total basic project cost are calculated to exceed 75% of the total basic project cost, the counties' portions are determined pro rata, so that the sum of the portions is 75%.