

# **Hamilton County Comprehensive Safety Plan for Corrections and Criminal Justice Reforms**

## ***Introduction***

Rarely does the opportunity to make a profound difference in the quality of life of an entire community present itself. However, with the introduction of the Hamilton County Safety Plan, we have such an opportunity at hand. The only question is whether we possess the resolve to make it work. I believe we, as a people, not only have that resolve, but that we also have the will, and the commitment, to see it through over the long haul.

We all know the reasons why we are at this juncture. Crime remains a serious issue that threatens every investment we are making in our future. Violent crime remains extraordinarily high, with violent juvenile crimes having almost tripled since 2001. Our existing corrections and criminal justice system has proven inadequate to the demand and to the task. One quick barometer of the county's failure in that regard is the percentage of criminals who offend again after they have been arrested, convicted and spent time in a correctional facility. In Hamilton County over 70% of the inmates who pass through our doors and into our custody commit crimes again after their release. This extraordinarily high recidivism rate assures that the total population of criminals engaging in illegal conduct will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. The rate of increase cannot be sustained if we are to reverse the flight of people and businesses from our county.

The county employs more forms of treatment diversion and alternatives than most other jurisdictions in Ohio. But simply providing programming is not the answer. The services provided must be effective. They must be delivered in the kind of setting that assures impact and success, or that at a minimum, provides the bare essentials in spatial requirements to allow the program to be administered at all. At present we lack that kind of space.

The adult inmate population in the county is served in five different facilities. 1,240 inmates go to the Hamilton County Justice center – the main building on Sycamore Street in downtown Cincinnati. Another 822 are housed at Queensgate – the over 100 year old former Kruse Warehouse building that is literally falling apart and poses serious risks to corrections

officers and inmates alike due to its design; its lack of visibility; its predominance of hiding places; its proximity to the “street” and other hazards. Two other buildings house another 210 inmates – 150 at a 70 year old converted automobile showroom and 60 at a 70 year old converted residential facility. The final 300-400 inmates are bussed 30 miles to Butler County. The Butler County operational expenses come from the county’s rainy day fund and present problems in the lack of any treatment options.

Looking at our juvenile population poses even greater difficulties and foreshadows an even greater increase in adult crime unless we make great strides in attacking crime up front. Recidivism is high; space for retaining juvenile felons is small and the prevalence of guns and violence in the commission of crimes is on an exponential increase. By sending juvenile felons into the state youth services system we forcibly remove them far away from home, family and mentors that could make a difference. We lose access to state funding that could be better spent locally. And the area’s youth receive no guarantee of intervention or treatment. They lose the ability to receive those essentials to altering behavior. Every year a new crop of juvenile offenders combines with the existing recidivist offenders creating an ever increasing cycle of violence and more crime.

Added to this mix of concerns are a stagnant tax base; a public safety and intervention system that is strained to the limit; facilities that long ago maxed out their ability to rehabilitate or to serve as an effective deterrent, and you have Hamilton County’s system. It is into this mix of issues that we are thrust.

### ***Prior History and Process***

Our collective responsibility and task is to take the discussion of the county’s overall public safety plan from the theoretical to the practical. Doing so converts the process from a county commission exercise to a shared responsibility between county elected representatives and citizens to now determine the best approach by which we will: succeed in eliminating issues of jail overcrowding; augment, enhance and reform the county’s integrated system of treatment, intervention, assessment and alternative sentencing; guarantee full funding for all aspects of the county criminal justice system for the duration of the program [30 years]; and offer the most cost effective and efficient manner.

Our community has been witness to numerous efforts over the past sixteen years that have failed to meet this responsibility. We saw the county commission focus on luxuries instead of priorities in the 90s, and by doing so, sap much of the financial flexibility our community has away from priority one issues of government like safety, schools and infrastructure. Recently we played witness to plans that were either rushed, or too political, or simply inadequate. We have run head-on into the clash between ideology and objectivity and between financial reality and wishful thinking. We saw individual political fortune placed ahead of public necessity. And the results of all of these have been adding more years to the problem of Hamilton County meeting its public safety responsibility in favor of the people of Hamilton County. Those failures of action by prior Boards of Commission end today. Today we place community need over all other considerations and articulate a plan that meets our responsibilities fully and completely.

The Comprehensive Plan we present today comes at the conclusion of an exhaustive process that includes three prior public hearings; an evaluation of prior reports; exploration of multiple options and funding formulas; the input of dozens of experts and local officials who are critical players in Hamilton County's complex criminal justice system; and the careful consideration of these by the county commission. The results are the most comprehensive presentation of a criminal justice plan designed to make a positive difference in reducing crime and reforming behaviors while adhering to fundamental principles of sound management practices and good fiscal responsibility that has ever been produced by the county.

## ***The Essentials of the Plan***

### ***1. Financing the Plan; Maximizing Savings***

The Hamilton County Comprehensive Plan takes on three essential components. First, it builds the facility we need by consolidating the current use of aging and inappropriate structures that are highly inefficient with a new consolidated facility built on donated property that is constructed in a manner that allows the introduction of in-facility appropriate inmate behavioral remediation services that will reform behaviors, reduce inappropriate lengths of stay and produce an efficient and effective Corrections operation. Overall, and when compared to prior proposals, the

measure we introduce today will result in: A) a \$26 Million savings in the cost of the primary facility compared to the November 2006 proposal; B) saving \$7 Million by securing a location that includes donated land on which to build the facility when compared to the November 2006 proposal; C) saving a minimum \$15 Million in overall facility costs by permitting the rental of certain spaces to federal authorities for federal inmates with the possibility of saving more if our system of intervention programming produces better than expected results; D) saves over \$200 Million in operational costs by consolidating facilities and reducing inefficiencies in operation; E) saves another \$200 Million+ by allowing the county the opportunity to pay “cash” for the cost of construction, eliminating the need to finance the project.

## ***2. Reforming Criminal Justice***

Our comprehensive plan introduces a series of reforms in the operations and approach to criminal justice by the county and it assures the completion of the effort for the time required to make a difference by guaranteeing funding for the full 30 year program. The permanent establishment of the Hamilton County Criminal Justice Commission will insure that the system of treatment, intervention, educational programming, alternative sentencing, assessment and the like will always be current, best practices and effective. The fiscally responsible funding approach that insures full funding for the 30 year life of the program will save county taxpayers over \$200 Million of general fund corrections obligations. These savings will pay for public safety enhancements at the county sheriff and prosecutor’s office and in local law enforcement and public safety investments in all 49 local Hamilton County cities, villages and townships. As a result, we will experience a significant increase in our ability to fight crime, prevent fires and respond to medical emergencies each day throughout the county.

## ***3. Reducing Juvenile Crime to Reduce Adult Criminal Behavior***

The third essential component of this initiative involves the introduction of Juvenile Crime and Corrections improvements. Beginning with the addition of a juvenile detention annex at 20/20 we will introduce local capacity of treating and working with more serious crime youth who have been adjudicated delinquent permitting greater family and mentor contact and allowing the introduction of innovative techniques to aid in providing more successful intervention. We are also funding for the life of the program a

new series of approaches designed to reform and/or reduce incidences of aberrant juvenile behaviors that result from lead poisoning and/or poor health and nutritional conditions. The net effect of the juvenile crime reduction measures will be the reduction of the numbers of youth who “graduate” into the adult criminal justice system.

### ***Next Steps in Hamilton County’s Safety Plan Process***

Over the next few weeks we will be conducting two public hearings and we will be presenting and speaking at as many public forums as possible where all of the mechanics and the specifics of these program elements will be discussed in detail. Our Public Hearings are scheduled for May 16 at 6:30 p.m. at the Bond Hill Community Center and on May 23 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sharonville Convention Center.

At our public hearings we hope to engage the community around the specifics of the plan and to get feedback on whether we are on the right track or not. We want your input on the details and the financing.

We also need to hear from the public about how we advance the financing of the plan. Should we still pursue a Special Election in August? Should we place the issue on the ballot in November? Should we act as a Board and simply enact the tax, subject to referendum? Or is there some other approach that the public suggests?

Any person or group desiring a presentation should call the Hamilton County Administrator’s Office to place a request by calling 946-4420.

### ***Conclusion***

In the end, we, as a community, have to be resolved as one to succeed in the effort. To be serious about the issue of reducing crime in our community we must both construct the facilities and systems to deal reactively with criminal misconduct and be equally committed to work proactively toward preventing such conduct from occurring at all in the first place. We have developed the essential framework in which to do both and both are required if we are to succeed. We ask the people of Hamilton County to join us and to commit to that success.