

NOTE: "With prisons at over 130 percent of capacity and an \$8 billion budget hole looming, Ohio can no longer afford to keep punting the reforms."



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Editorial: Delayed action

Criminal sentencing reform has been studied long enough. It is past time for Ohio to make the changes

Under ideal circumstances, the suggestion this week by county prosecutors to remove criminal sentencing reforms from Gov. John Kasich's proposed budget would deserve serious consideration. John Murphy, executive director of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, prefers that the changes be considered in a separate bill.

The argument reflects a reasonable concern that a \$55.7 billion appropriations measure, which must be passed by July 1, is not the right vehicle in which to embed complicated policy changes that deserve the additional attention they would get if broken out in separate legislation. In all, Murphy noted in his testimony, the criminal sentencing reforms change more than 60 sections of Ohio's criminal code and add three new ones.

The problem is that the sentencing reforms have been fully examined, prosecutors and others having ample opportunity to comment. Ted Strickland advanced the idea during his term as governor, also including the ideas in a budget proposal. When that didn't work, state Sen. Bill Seitz, a Cincinnati Republican, pushed the necessary changes through his sponsorship of a separate bill. It, too, bogged down.

With prisons at over 130 percent of capacity and an \$8 billion budget hole looming, Ohio can no longer afford to keep punting the reforms. The changes Kasich has in mind would steer low-level offenders to cheaper, community-based facilities. Of particular concern to prosecutors, the package includes proposals for early release of prisoners and expansion of an existing earned credit system, prisoners earning time by participating in educational and counseling programs that reduce the chances of future criminal behavior and more prison time.

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