

THE PLAIN DEALER

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Northeast Ohio leaders embrace sentencing reform law during Gov. John Kasich visit

By Mark Naymik

Northeast Ohio community leaders publicly embraced Ohio's new sentencing reform law Tuesday at an event with its chief cheerleader, Gov. John Kasich.

"This bill is a long time coming," State Sen. Nina Turner of Cleveland said, standing behind a lectern at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church on Cleveland's East Side, before a couple dozen politicians, ministers and people who work directly with felons.

In addition to evening out the penalties for crack and powder cocaine, the law, formerly known as House Bill 86, diverts low-level criminals – such as those arrested with drug paraphernalia – to community based programs focused on rehabilitation and education. It also allows future inmates to earn shorter sentences if they complete education and mental health programs while incarcerated.

"I am here to testify that HB 86 puts us well on the way to creating the right conditions" for making productive citizens out of felons, she said.

But Turner, a Democrat who commended Kasich and other Republicans who backed sentencing reform after years of inaction by the GOP- controlled legislature, warned that more must be done to achieve their shared goal of keeping felons out of prison. Turner said legislators must work to review and eliminate laws that prohibit some felons from holding jobs.

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