

OJACC

Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections

40 Years Promoting and Supporting Effective Community Corrections

Mission:

To bring together stakeholders to promote and support effective community corrections that enhance public safety.

www.ojacc.org

Officers:

Pres: Ro-Ellen Sinkewich

1st VP: Honorable Theresa Dellick

2nd VP: Terrance Hinton

Sec.: Katie Stenman

Treas.: Linda Janes

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President's Message

By Ro-Ellen Sinkewich, OJACC President

As President of the [Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections](http://www.ojacc.org) (OJACC) and the Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships for Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana, I am in a unique position to clearly see the bridges needed to fill the gap between advocacy and direct service implementation. I am proud to serve in these dual roles, developing partnerships that provide housing, clinical treatment, and reentry services for justice-involved individuals and policy advocacy uniting stakeholders to improve community corrections and enhance public safety.



OJACC serves as an essential "umbrella" organization that unites stakeholders from every corner of the criminal justice system. Our mission is simple but profound: to promote effective community corrections that enhance public safety and reduce the need for costly incarceration. By aligning the expertise of our individual members with the collaborative power of OJACC, we are working to build a safer Ohio where every individual has the opportunity for a second chance.

Our work is centered on the belief that a collaborative approach is the most effective way to improve the criminal justice system. By fostering dialogue through our Board of Trustees, specialized committees, and annual trainings and conferences, we develop solutions that support successful reentry and reduce recidivism.

OJACC provides a platform for professionals to share expertise and advocate for policies that keep our communities safe while providing returning citizens with the tools they need to succeed.

We encourage all who are committed to a safer Ohio and a more effective justice system to [join our alliance](http://www.ojacc.org) and contribute to these essential conversations.

If you're not already an OJACC member, [I encourage you to join now!](https://www.ojacc.org/membership-join/) <https://www.ojacc.org/membership-join/>

We are also pleased to invite you to our 39th Annual Conference, taking place on October 15th and 16th, 2026, at the Ohioan Conference and Event Center (formerly Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center)! This year's event is extra special as we will be commemorating OJACC's remarkable 40th anniversary of *promoting and supporting effective community corrections that enhance public safety*. Don't miss this milestone celebration filled with inspiring sessions, dynamic speakers, and opportunities to connect with passionate professionals from across Ohio!

Submissions:

The OJACC Newsletter is a biannual publication of the Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections. Subscription is free to all members.

The OJACC Newsletter encourages submission of articles relating to community corrections. Articles must be relatively brief, and OJACC reserves the right to edit articles for space considerations and to select which articles to publish.

Points of view expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJACC.

OJACC accepts paid advertising.

Article

Submission

& Advertising:

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Announcing the 2026-2027 OJACC Officers

At the December 5, 2025 Board of Trustees meeting, the following officers were elected for 2026-2027:

President Ro-Ellen Sinkewich, Senior Director of Volunteers of America, Ohio & Indiana

First Vice President Judge Theresa Dellick, Mahoning County Juvenile Court

Second Vice President Terrance Hinton, Assistant Director, City of Columbus, Office of Violence Prevention

Secretary, Katie Stenman, Court Administrator, Delaware County Probate/Juvenile Court

Treasurer Linda Janes, Corrections Consultant

Together they provide many years of diverse experience ideal for leading OJACC to the achievement of its mission, to promote and support effective community corrections that enhance public safety!

SAVE THE DATE

2026 OJACC Annual Conference & OJACC 40th Anniversary

The 39th Annual OJACC Conference will be held on

October 15th and 16th, 2026

The Ohioan Hotel and Event Center
(formerly Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center)
100 Green Meadows Drive, Lewis Center,
Ohio 43035

THE
OHIOAN
HOTEL & EVENT CENTER



OJACC Congratulates the 2025 Clifford Skeen Award Winners!

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) held the 31st annual Clifford Skeen Awards Ceremony on October 9, 2025, as part of the Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections (OJACC) conference at the Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center in Lewis Center.

The Clifford Skeen Awards were initiated as part of former Governor George Voinovich's administration to demonstrate commitment to community corrections as a viable alternative to incarceration. The award was conceptualized by former Lieutenant Governor and former U.S. Senator Mike DeWine and former ODRC Director Reginald Wilkinson.

These awards commemorate the late Ohio Representative Clifford Skeen, who served eight terms and sponsored the Community Correction Act, enacted by the Ohio Legislature in 1979. This act sought to reduce the number of non-dangerous offenders committed to state prisons. Representative Skeen played a crucial role in securing increased funding for numerous community corrections initiatives. Established in 1993, the Clifford Skeen Award recognizes dedication to community corrections as an effective alternative to incarceration.

Ohio values its community corrections programs, and the ODRC, in collaboration with local corrections agencies, has contributed to the development of professional and secure community sanctions. These sanctions allow individuals to remain in the community and access necessary services, thereby preserving limited prison and jail resources for violent offenders.

The selection committee included former Cliff Skeen Award recipients and a representative from the Bureau of Community Sanctions. After conducting thorough interviews with Ohio's top scoring programs in each category, the panel recommended the following recipients for the 2025 Skeen Awards:

- **Residential: Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana Dayton Residential Reentry Program**
- **Innovation: MonDay Community Correctional Institution**
- **Prison Diversion Program: Lorain County Adult Probation Department**
- **Jail Diversion Program: Norwalk Municipal Adult Probation Department**

The Department's vision for community corrections is founded upon collaborative and cooperative partnerships between state and local agencies. The Clifford Skeen Awards serve to recognize achievements in this essential area. The ceremony provides a platform for the Department to honor exceptional programs for their daily efforts in offering alternatives to incarceration and promoting public safety.

The ODRC and the Bureau of Community Sanctions sincerely thank our community partners for the hard work and dedication put forth each day. Your continued partnership and dedicated efforts are critical in supporting the ODRC Mission, "To reduce recidivism among those we touch" and Vision, "To reduce crime in Ohio". If you would like additional information about the Clifford Skeen Awards or community correction programs, please contact Matthew Morris, Chief of the Bureau of Community Sanctions, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction at 740-845-4772 or Matthew.Morris@drc.ohio.gov

OJACC Trustees

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OJACC's 38th Annual Conference: Exploring New Horizons in Community Corrections

The Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections (OJACC) welcomed professionals from across the state on October 9–10, 2025, for its 38th Annual Conference, *Exploring New Horizons in Community Corrections*. Held at the Ohioan Hotel & Conference Center in Lewis Center, the two-day event brought together leaders, practitioners, and innovators committed to strengthening Ohio's community corrections landscape.

This year's theme—innovation, resilience, and the future of community corrections—was reflected throughout the agenda, from cutting-edge discussions on artificial intelligence to hands-on workshops addressing trauma, reentry, and system reform.

The conference launched with a forward-looking general session, **"How Can AI Help Us Build a Better Community for Tomorrow?"**, featuring Myrinda Smith, Ph.D.; Joseph Arvidson; Jennifer Scott; and Vineela Kunapareddi. The panel explored how evidence-based practices intersect with emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, to support safer, more responsive communities. The session examined *"the intersection of proven practices and emerging technologies—especially artificial intelligence (AI)—to envision a more connected, responsive, and resilient future."* Live demonstrations, survey insights from OJACC members, and real-world examples helped attendees envision how AI can enhance—not replace—the human element central to community corrections.

Across both days, attendees participated in a wide range of workshops designed to equip professionals with actionable strategies and practical tools for today's challenges. Sessions addressed: Technology and Innovation, Health, Safety and Well-Being, Youth Justice and System Reform, and a hands-on reentry simulation illustrating real-world barriers for those

The conference concluded with an engaging and relatable presentation by Karen Vadino, MSW, LPCC, OCPSII. Her session, **"Mind Over Monsters,"** explored how stress can distort perception and create internal barriers. *"It is amazing how many monsters get built in our brains when we're stressed."* Vadino offered practical tools to help professionals recognize stress responses and build healthier coping strategies—an essential skill in a field where burnout and compassion fatigue are common.

With more than a dozen workshops, two powerful general sessions, and opportunities for networking and recognition, the 2025 OJACC Annual Conference delivered both inspiration and practical knowledge. Attendees left with new tools, deeper connections, and a renewed commitment to strengthening community corrections across Ohio.

OJACC extends its gratitude to all presenters, participants, exhibitors, and the OJACC Conference Committee who made this year's event a success. Planning is already underway for 2026, and the organization looks forward to continuing its mission of promoting and supporting effective community corrections that enhance public safety.



OJACC 2025 Achievement Awards and Dr. Ed Latessa Tribute Presentation Award Presented at Annual Conference

OJACC is honored to recognize individuals each year at its annual conference who have shown dedication to improving community corrections. The 2025 OJACC Achievement Award recipients are identified below, along with comments from their nominators.

Representative C.J. McLin Award: Judge Joyce Kimbler, Medina County Court of Common Pleas.

The late Representative C.J. McLin, Jr., during his tenure in the General Assembly, actively worked to improve community corrections through funding and legislative change. The award is given annually to an elected official in Ohio who has worked to improve community corrections in Ohio.



Nomination information:

Judge Joyce V. Kimbler has been a judge of the Medina County Court of Common Pleas since 2015, having been elected in 2014 and re-elected in 2020. Judge Kimbler presides over two specialized dockets certified by the Ohio Supreme Court, Drug Court and Mental Health Court. Judge Kimbler received a B.A. from Evangel College and her J.D. from the University of Akron. She was admitted to the Ohio Bar in 1982. She then served as a judicial clerk for Judge William Baird at the Ninth District Court of Appeals. Thereafter, she was in practice as a trial attorney for 29 years. Judge Kimbler's Drug Court was featured in a documentary entitled *Second Chances: One Year in Ohio's Drug Courts*. Judge Joyce V. Kimbler's Medina Intervention Program (MIP) and the mission of the Medina County Drug Court is to improve the overall quality of life in the community by providing a court-supervised program for substance-dependent offenders that will enhance their likelihood of being productive members of society, while keeping the community safe. The Medina Intervention Program is a multidisciplinary team ensuring that best practices and standards are the core function when operating the drug court program. Drug courts are considered the most effective strategy for reducing addiction, crime, and recidivism while promoting real positive change in individual lives.

Dr. Bennett J. Cooper Award: Nicholas Emmons, ODRC.

Dr. Bennett J. Cooper was the first Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction in Ohio. During his lifetime, he has made many improvements to public policy regarding corrections. He has worked at the national level to institutionalize needed changes. This award is given to a correctional administrator or policymaker who has shown a lifetime commitment to the improvement of community corrections.



Nomination information:

Nick Emmons has demonstrated an unwavering dedication to reentry by working with community partners, building relationships within community corrections and programming, and always going above and beyond for the individuals we serve. Nick has been instrumental in overseeing and hosting numerous Reentry Simulations throughout the state for both staff and justice-involved people. He has continued to enhance relationships with community partners by keeping them engaged and offering opportunities for them to visit institutions and engage with staff and men and women being released. Recognizing housing as a major barrier, Nick actively works with providers to secure stable options and advocates for a fair chance for clients. His commitment to clients and their families makes him highly deserving of this award.

Dr. Simon Dinitz Award : Dr. Myrinda Schweitzer Smith, UCCI

Through his work at Ohio State University, Dr. Simon Dinitz has dedicated his life to improving the knowledge base of corrections. He has served on state and national commissions whose purpose was to improve the corrections system. As an educator, he has also trained many correctional practitioners in the state. This award is given to a community correctional practitioner who has made contributions to improving community corrections in Ohio.



Nomination information:

Dr. Myrinda Schweitzer Smith received her Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati School of Criminal Justice and is the Executive Director of the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute. Dr. Schweitzer Smith has co-authored publications, presented nationally and internationally on effective interventions, and served as a project director for over 300 projects involving program evaluation, the development and implementation of cognitive-behavioral programs for delinquency, criminality, substance abuse, employment, and sexual offending, and effective practices for community supervision and support. As a cognitive-behavioral interventions specialist, she presented at the 5th International Training School on Core Correctional Skills through a partnership with the Confederation of European Probation and has also appeared as a guest speaker on Rehub, an international App highlighting the latest global developments in rehabilitation. She is currently serving as co-Principal Investigator on a 7-year National Institute of Justice grant exploring effective reentry practices, as well as Principal Investigator on a 3-year Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention grant aimed at transforming the Juvenile Justice workforce. Also, serving in her second year as research co-chair of the International Community Justice Association, Dr. Schweitzer Smith serves and participates on a multitude of advisory boards and professional organizations supporting the health and wellbeing of those working in and impacted by the justice system. She has published in both academic and practitioner journals including Criminal Justice Policy Review, Victims & Offenders, Journal of Crime and Justice, Perspectives, and Federal Probation.

Mindy gives tirelessly of her time and talents to assist Ohio community corrections agencies in their efforts to improve themselves.

Wichtman/Gautner Award: Melissa Pierson, Franklin County Office of Justice Policy and Programs

Jim Wichtman was one of the founders and a long-time board member of the Ohio Community Corrections Organization, now known as the Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections (OJACC). Molly Gauntner faithfully served on the OJACC Board of Trustees for more than a decade. Jim and Molly dedicated their careers to the progressive development of community corrections with great passion and commitment. They were visionaries committed to transforming the field and improving the lives of those we serve. Their tireless work strengthened OJACC and improved community corrections. This award honors an OJACC Board Member who has dedicated themselves to OJACC's mission.



Nomination information:

Melissa currently serves as the Interim Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Franklin County Office of Justice Policy and Programs (OJPP). One of Melissa's most notable achievements is the oversight of all formula and discretionary grant-related operations, including federal, state, and local awards totaling over \$12 million annually. She has also served as the primary grant writer for OJPP with a history of securing and administering over \$23 million in grants from a variety of federal, state, and local entities. Melissa has been instrumental in launching and coordinating innovative smart justice initiatives such as the Tap In Center, BRIDGE Respite Housing, Just Counts, Landlord Incentive and Mitigation programs, One Door Franklin County, and Safer Stations. Her collaboration on a multi-agency initiative implementing pre-release Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in the jail system was recently recognized by the Department of Justice as one of three jurisdictions nationwide for excellence in MAT implementation.

In addition to her professional accomplishments, Melissa is known for her integrity, empathy, and unwavering commitment to the well-being of her team. She has created an inclusive and supportive work environment where every individual feels valued and empowered to contribute their best.

Melissa's visionary leadership extends beyond her agency. She is actively involved in a variety of federal and statewide associations, including serving as the Treasurer of OJACC. Melissa has also lent her expertise and passion to numerous OJACC committees and projects that have moved this association forward. In the spirit of Jim Wichtman and Molly Gaunter, Melissa has dedicated her career to transforming the field of community corrections and improving the lives of those we serve. She truly embodies the mission of OJACC!

***Dr. Ed Latessa Tribute Presentation
OJACC 2024 Conference Recipient: Alex Harper***

In 2022, the OJACC Board of Trustees established the Dr. Ed Latessa Tribute Presentation that comple-

ments and furthers the work of Dr. Latessa to honor his lasting impact on the field of community corrections. Each year, a conference session is selected that highlights Dr. Latessa's groundbreaking work—particularly his commitment to research, evaluation, and translating evidence into practice. His efforts helped the field understand what truly drives effective community corrections and continue to guide our work today.

Ed Latessa Tribute Presentation Award: Jennifer Scott, UCCI

Nomination Information:

Jen Scott is the current Director of Innovation & Outreach at the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI) with 20 years of corrections, public relations, and organizational leadership experience. UCCI was the vision and passion of former Director of the School of Criminal Justice, Dr. Ed Latessa. The institute's overarching goal is to provide resources and support to the field of corrections in an effort to create safer communities and stop the cycle of recidivism. Jen began her career at UCCI in 2012 as a Program Director, becoming an Associate Director in 2023. Anyone who works with Jen knows her bubbly enthusiasm is contagious. Jen received her Bachelor of Arts, Music, Theatre from Northern Kentucky University. Jen graduated Magna Cum Laude, was a D. Albright Scholarship Recipient, Dean Scholarship Recipient, and a Corbett Scholarship Recipient. Jen co-leads a dynamic team dedicated to advancing evidence-based practices in corrections through training, technical assistance, and innovative product development. Jennifer has served as Principal Investigator on numerous federal, state, and local grants, managing initiatives that support corrections agencies nationwide. Her expertise spans program design, contract negotiation, intellectual property management, and large-scale event coordination, including UCCI's Annual Training Institutes. Anyone who has worked with Jen can attest to her energy, passion, attention to detail, humor, and genuine love of our field. The grants Jen has helped secure are too numerous to mention, but chances are the grant funds or training opportunities resulting from the grants have affected your work in some capacity. We are honored to nominate Jen for this very special award.



Impartial or Invested? Why We May Have Missed the Mark

Brian Lovins, Justice Systems Partners

Imagine your child wants to learn piano. You contact two potential instructors. The first describes their approach: "I'm here to be impartial. I'll monitor their practice time, document what they're doing wrong, and let you know if they're not meeting expectations. I think it is important to maintain professional boundaries."

The second says: "I'm invested in your child's success. I'll figure out what motivates them, celebrate their progress, work through their struggles with them, and adjust my approach based on what they need. I believe they can do this, and I'm going to help them get there. They are going to have to practice and I am going to be tough—holding them accountable to getting better."

Which instructor gets your money?

The answer is obvious when it's our kids. Yet in corrections, we've built entire systems on the first model. We train staff to be impartial observers rather than invested partners. We train them to maintain distance, enforce compliance, be firm but fair, and document failures. Then we wonder why recidivism stays stubbornly high, why staff burn out, and why the people who are identified as moderate to high risk struggle to change.

What Invested Actually Means

Let's be clear about what "invested" doesn't mean. It doesn't mean being a pushover. It doesn't mean ignoring violations or abandoning accountability. It doesn't mean becoming personally enmeshed in someone's life or losing professional judgment.

Being invested means believing the person in front of you can change—and actively working to help them do it. It means our purpose isn't just to monitor compliance but to facilitate growth. It means measuring success not by how many contacts you made or violations written but by how many people are actually doing

When we are invested, we ask different questions. Not just "Did they show up?" but "What got in the way?" Not just "Did you fail the drug test?" but "What was working when you didn't use last week, and what do you need to get back on track?" Not just "You violated your conditions" but "How do we prevent this from happening again and help you reach your potential?"

The Real Costs of Impartial

Here's what we lose when we insist on impartial:

For people under supervision: They experience the system as something to be endured rather than engaged with. Us versus them approach is reinforced. They learn to tell us what we want to hear rather than what they actually need. They don't develop the relationships that research shows are critical to change.

For staff: They're set up to fail at a job that misses the mark. Humans are wired for connection and purpose. When we are told to "just be impartial" or "it's on them to change," we strip meaning from our work and wonder why we are exhausted, cynical, or leaving the field within a few years. Staff who see their purpose as facilitating change report higher job satisfaction, lower burnout, and better retention. They also tend to be the ones still doing this work ten, fifteen, twenty years later—the institutional knowledge and expertise we desperately need.

For community safety: Impartial staff focus on compliance, not capability. They can tell you who showed up for supervision but not who's building the skills to stay crime-free. Research across counseling, education, and corrections consistently shows that the quality of the helping relationship accounts for about 7-8% of variance in outcomes. That's not trivial! And we know that without a relationship, any skills we try to infuse fall flat.

Addressing the Fears

I know what you're thinking. "We can't just be invested. These are risky people. They'll manipulate us. We'll lose our authority."

Let's unpack these concerns:

Boundaries: Being invested doesn't mean abandoning boundaries. In fact, clear boundaries are what make genuine investment possible. A coach sets boundaries around practice time, effort, and behavior—not to create distance but to create the structure needed for growth. The same is true in corrections. Invested staff maintain clear, consistent boundaries precisely because they care about outcomes.

Manipulation: Here's the paradox—impartial staff are actually more vulnerable to manipulation because they're working with less information. When someone knows we're just checking boxes, they learn to check boxes. When they know we're genuinely invested in their success, authenticity becomes valuable. And invested staff, who've built real relationships, are often better at detecting deception because they know the person well enough to notice when something's off.

Authority: The deepest authority doesn't come from emotional distance—it comes from competence and genuine care. Think about the teachers, coaches, or mentors who had the most influence in your own life. Chances are they were invested in your success, not impartial to it. Research on procedural justice shows that perceived legitimacy (which drives compliance) comes from people believing the system cares about them and wants them to succeed.

What the Evidence Shows

The research is unambiguous. Professional alliance—the quality of the working relationship between a staff and the person they're helping—predicts outcomes across virtually every helping field. In corrections specifically:

- Officers trained in relationship-based approaches see significant reductions in recidivism
- Staff who view their role as facilitating change (rather than just monitoring compliance) have better outcomes

- Organizations that shift from compliance-focused to change-focused models see improvements not just in recidivism but in staff retention, morale, and community relationships

Some jurisdictions are already making this shift, moving from what we might call a "referee" model to a "coaching" model. Early results are promising—not just in outcomes but in how staff talk about their work. They describe feeling more effective, more energized, and more aligned with why they entered this field in the first place.

What This Looks Like in Practice

An invested officer doesn't ignore a missed appointment—they follow up to understand what happened and problem-solve barriers.

They don't just refer someone to treatment—they check in on how it's going and help the person navigate challenges.

They don't just document progress—they acknowledge it, name it, and help the person see their own growth.

They still hold people accountable. But accountability in the service of growth looks different than accountability in the service of compliance. One builds capacity; the other just measures it.

The Choice We Make

Every day, we make a choice about what we're asking our staff to be. Impartial observers or invested partners. Referees or coaches. Compliance monitors or change facilitators.

The stakes are real. The person struggling with addiction who needs someone to believe recovery is possible. The staff member wondering if this job has meaning. The community that deserves to be safer.

We wouldn't choose impartial for our own children. Why do we choose it for our work?

Questions for Reflection

- How do staff in your organization describe their purpose?

What messages—explicit and implicit—do your policies, training, and culture send about staff investment in people's success?

What would need to change to support staff being genuinely invested while maintaining appropriate boundaries and accountability?

What are you measuring, and does it capture whether people are actually doing better—or just whether they're compliant?

The future of corrections won't be built on better monitoring technology or stricter enforcement. It will be built on staff who see their purpose as helping people change and organizations that support them in doing exactly that.

Brian Lovins is President of Justice System Partners. For more information about evidence-based approaches to transforming corrections practice, contact JSP at brian@justicesystempartners.org.



The Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project

Terrance Hinton, Ph.D.

Across the country, there is growing recognition that education inside prisons can play a meaningful role in strengthening communities, improving reentry outcomes, and supporting public safety. One initiative that reflects this approach is the Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project, commonly known as OPEEP, which is led by The Ohio State University in partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. The project brings together incarcerated students and campus-based students to learn alongside one another in college-level classrooms that are located directly inside correctional facilities. By creating a shared learning environment that emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and critical thinking, the program helps prepare students to think more thoughtfully about crime, justice, and community safety.



For the past four years, I have had the privilege of teaching within this program at several Ohio correctional institutions, including London Correctional Institution and, most recently, the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville. The course I teach is titled Control and Prevention of Crime and Delinquency, and while the subject matter may sound familiar to many criminal justice courses, the learning environment is quite different. Instead of sitting in a traditional university classroom, students meet inside a prison setting where Ohio State students and incarcerated students learn together as peers. Currently, the course includes nineteen incarcerated students and ten Ohio State students, creating a classroom community of twenty-nine individuals pursuing their bachelor's degrees.

The incarcerated students in this program represent the first cohort participating in Ohio State's bachelor's degree completion pathway offered through the Department of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies. Through this opportunity, students currently incarcerated can work toward earning a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio State University, with tuition and fees fully covered. This initiative marks an important milestone because it demonstrates that higher education is possible even within correctional settings and that incarcerated individuals can engage in rigorous academic work that prepares them for life beyond prison.

What makes these classes particularly meaningful is the collaborative nature of the learning process. While the structure of the course includes lectures, assigned readings, written reflections, and graded papers similar to any university class, the real strength of the program lies in the dialogue that develops among students. Rather than relying only on traditional lectures, the classroom environment encourages discussion and shared learning. Much of each class period is spent with incarcerated students and campus students intentionally mixed together in small groups where they discuss course material, share perspectives, and work collectively to understand complex issues related to crime and justice. These conversations often explore the causes of crime, the effectiveness of different crime control strategies, and the broader social forces that influence criminal justice policies. Students examine topics such as deterrence, mass incarceration, restorative justice, and community-based prevention strategies while also considering the ways race, economic conditions, and politics have shaped criminal justice systems over time. By learning together in this setting, students are able to connect academic theory with lived experience in a way that deepens understanding for everyone involved.

The structure of the class is pretty flexible, but the following is typically how class starts: At the beginning of each class session we often start with simple icebreaker activities that allow students to become more comfortable with one another before engaging in discussion. These moments help create a classroom atmosphere built on trust and respect. As the semester progresses, relationships develop and students begin to see each other not through labels or stereotypes but through shared intellectual curiosity and a common commitment to learning.

In many ways the class becomes less about a professor delivering information and more about a community of learners working together to better understand how crime can be prevented and how communities can become safer. The exchange of ideas between students who come from very different life experiences creates

powerful learning opportunities that cannot easily be replicated in a traditional classroom setting. The impact of these programs extends far beyond the prison walls, as research consistently shows that higher education opportunities for incarcerated individuals significantly reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Education also increases the chances that individuals returning to society will obtain stable employment, develop stronger support networks, and contribute positively to their communities. Because ninety to ninety five percent of incarcerated individuals will eventually return home, the benefits of prison education programs directly influence the health and safety of our neighborhoods, which is why this connection is especially important for professionals working in the field of community corrections. Many individuals who leave prison will transition into community supervision programs such as parole, probation, or other forms of community-based support. When individuals return to their communities with college credits or even a completed degree, they often have greater opportunities for employment and personal stability. These factors can play a significant role in helping individuals successfully reintegrate while reducing the likelihood that they will return to the criminal justice system.

Perhaps the most powerful moment of each semester comes on the final day of class when students gather one last time before the course concludes. Saying goodbye is often difficult because the class has spent months learning, debating, and growing together. Yet even after the semester ends, the shared experience remains a reminder that education has the power to build connections, challenge assumptions, and inspire change. Ultimately, the Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project demonstrates that meaningful learning can take place in unexpected spaces and that when people come together with a shared commitment to knowledge and understanding, they can begin to imagine new pathways toward justice and community safety. By investing in education, collaboration, and dialogue, programs like this help strengthen individuals, support successful reentry, and contribute to safer communities for us all.

History of OJACC

As we celebrate OJACC's 40 years of Promoting and Supporting Effective Community Corrections that Enhance Public Safety, we thought this would be a good time to highlight the history of OJACC.

The vision for OJACC (Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections) resulted from a group of community corrections professionals coming together with involved state agencies to address the rising prison population in the early 1980s. This group saw real value in bringing together all aspects of community corrections to work toward common goals.

The association began with the officers and committee representation from Secure Facilities, Residential Facilities, Victim Witness, CCA Programs, and Probation. It did not take long to realize there were many more influences on community corrections than those initially involved, and, over the years, additional representatives from associations and state agencies have been added to truly represent the big picture of community corrections. With this diverse representation, we have not always agreed on everything. However, it has truly provided an understanding and respect for the work that goes into all areas of community corrections. Over the years, we also identified the need to include issues related to Juvenile Justice.

This type of association does not occur in other states. Our ability to work together among community corrections agencies, DRC, DYS, and other state agencies and stakeholders has helped Ohio become a leader in community corrections. By focusing on our common goals of improving community corrections, we learn from each other and learn to work together.

The original name of OJACC was OCCO (Ohio Community Corrections Organization). In 2005, the board voted to change the association's name from OCCO to OJACC. This came as a result of OHHA changing its name to OCCA to reflect the name change of IRCA to ICCA. To reduce confusion between OCCO and OCCA, the board decided to change the name to better reflect the organization's work.

In the early years, the administrative tasks required to keep the organization going were completed by board members. As the organization grew, the board recognized the need for administrative assistance and hired an Organizational Coordinator in 1990, which greatly enhanced the organization's professionalism.

There have been so many extremely dedicated professionals involved in OJACC over the years. Highlights from comments by the first and second presidents of the association, from one of our very early newsletters, exemplify the original goals of OCCO – OJACC that continue today. First president, Richard Billak wrote, *“It was only three short years ago that a group of us came together and asked, how can we take control of our own destiny? Some thirty-six months later, the answer seems obvious – by collectively working together.”* The second president, James Wichtman, wrote, *“We have learned that we use our clearest voice and receive attention to what we have to say when we present our message together. This unity is the very purpose of the Ohio Community Corrections Organization’s existence. Though we recognize the importance each stakeholder plays in the delivery of correctional services, we have experienced true strength when we stood together.”*

OCCO/OJACC’s original founders were Richard Billak, James Lawrence, James Wichtman, Candace Peters, and Neil Tillow.

ODRC began presenting the Clifford Skeen Awards at the OJACC Conference in 2007. Each year, OJACC has sponsored lunches for Clifford Skeen Award winning agencies at the Awards Luncheon so their staff and stakeholders may partake in this recognition.

In 2006, OJACC, in cooperation with ODRC, created the OJACC Community Corrections Collaborative, consisting of community corrections organizations represented by OJACC, including OCCA, OCPOA, CorJus, and independent CBCFs, and representatives from ODRC. The collaborative group works on common initiatives to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of state funded community corrections.

Cheryl Taylor served as Organizational Coordinator for 25 years.

The original name of OJACC was OCCO (Ohio Community Corrections Organization) and the first newsletter was published in 1988.

OJACC holds a Strategic Planning board retreat biennially to prioritize goals for the next two years.

40 Years Promoting and Supporting Effective Community Corrections that Enhance Public Safety



- Ohio Common Pleas Judge’s Assoc.
- Ohio Assoc. of Juv. Court Judges
- Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Assoc.
- Buckeye States Sheriff’s Assoc.
- Cty Commr’s Assoc. of Ohio
- Youth Serving Organizations
- Ohio Community Corrections Assoc.
- The Supreme Court of Ohio
- Oh Assoc. of Local Reentry Coalition
- Ohio Chief Probation Officer Assoc.
- Ohio Muni Attorneys Association
- Juvenile Justice Coalition
- Ohio Victim Witness Assoc.
- CorJus, Inc.
- Ohio TASC Association
- Ohio Assoc. for Court Admin.
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- National Youth Advocate Programs
- Specialty Dockets

Ex Officio:

- Ohio Dept. of Youth Services
- Ohio Dept. of Rehabilitation & Corr.
- Ohio Office of Crim. Justice Servs.
- Ohio Public Defender’s Office
- Ohio Dept. of Dev. Disabilities
- Oh Dept. of Behavioral Health
- Ohio Judicial Conference
- Ohio Dept. of Job and Family Servs.
- Office of the Ohio Attorney General

In 1990, OJACC created Achievement Awards named for Representative C.J. McLin, Dr. Bennett Cooper, and Dr. Simon Dinitz. OJACC added the Jim Wichtman award in 2006, changed it to the Wichtman/Gauntner Award in 2025, and added the Dr. Ed Latessa Tribute Presentation Award in 2022.

OJACC Past Presidents:

- Richard Billak
- James Wichtman
- Robert Proud
- Candace Peters
- Hon. Anthony Gretick
- Marc Warner
- Tracy Robinson
- Monda DeWeese
- Hon. Thomas Loudon
- Kristina Hawk
- Phil Nunes
- Gayle Dittmer
- Scott Sylak
- Hon. Keith Spaeth
- Anne Connell-Freund
- Hon. Nancy Fuerst
- Hon. Jim Slagle
- Kysten Palmore
- Michael Randle
- Linda Janes

OJACC has held 38 annual conferences advancing best practices across the state. The 39th Annual Conference is scheduled for Oct. 15th & 16th, 2026.

**Special Thanks to Our 2025
Conference Sponsors!**

Lunch Sponsor:



Afternoon Break Sponsor:



Exhibitors:



For 40 years, OJACC has brought together Ohio's criminal justice stakeholders to include judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors, pre-trial and probation officers, law enforcement officials, corrections officials from adult and juvenile systems, treatment providers, reentry practitioners, and victims' representatives to promote and support effective community corrections that enhance public safety. Few other states have achieved this type of umbrella organization which represents Ohio's collaborative efforts that have led to Ohio's place as a leader in Community Corrections.

Together we:

- Work with state agencies, legislators, and other stakeholders on policy/issues affecting community corrections.
- Hold a biennial board retreat to focus the efforts of the organization and guide our mission.
- Host a biennial legislative reception with OJACC member organizations to educate legislators on issues vital to the improvement of community corrections. OJACC also takes positions throughout the year on pending legislation affecting community corrections and provides input on the development of legislation.
- OJACC's Adult Community Corrections Collaborative, comprised of associations providing state-funded community corrections services, works with the ODRC for the overall improvement of these services and highlights benefits and cost savings of community corrections.
- Hold an annual conference and/or virtual learning opportunities for personal development/networking to educate and inform service providers and stakeholders on issues of importance to community corrections and provide tools to enhance services. Individuals and agencies are also recognized through achievement awards.
- Provide newsletters throughout the year highlighting evidence-based practices, promising practices, and issues important to the field of community corrections.

Please consider membership in OJACC to help support these efforts.

2026 OJACC Membership Application

Agency/Dept.: Click here to enter text. **Name of Agency Representative:** Click here to enter text.

Address: Click here to enter text. **City/State/Zip:** Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text. **E-Mail:** Click here to enter text.

Type of Membership (Please Check One)

- Individual Membership \$30** - Allows an individual in the field of criminal justice or interested citizens to join. Individuals representing private for-profit corporations are excluded from this category. Includes discounted conference registrations.
- Government or Private Agency** – Allows governmental or private, not-for-profit agencies to join. Examples of private agency members are halfway houses, private correctional agencies, and child-caring agencies. Examples of Governmental Agencies include state agencies, courts, CBCFs, and probation departments. Includes discounted conference registrations for up to 7 staff from the agency. **Five** members from the agency receive a \$25 discount for annual conference fees. **For agencies with a budget of less than \$500,000, membership is \$165, and for agencies with a budget of \$500,000 or greater, membership is \$275.**
- County Membership** – Allows **county commissioner, judge, prosecutor, chief probation officer, and sheriff** from a county to join. These offices may designate an employee from that office to represent them but are specific to the listed positions. **Five** members from the county receive a \$25 discount for annual conference fees. **For counties with a population under 150,000, membership is \$165, and for counties with a population of 150,000 or greater, membership is \$275.** Includes discounted conference registrations for up to 5 staff from county membership agencies.

Checks payable to Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections. Mail to **PO BOX 79, New Albany, Ohio 43054**

Or Charge Membership to: Visa Master Card

Name on card: Click here to enter text. **Address on card:** Click here to enter text. **Zip Code:** Click here to enter text.

Card # Click here to enter text. **Expiration Date:** Click here to enter text. **3 #s from back** Click here to enter text.

OJACC Federal Tax ID Number: 31-1255020 For questions, contact ojacc.director@gmail.com or 740-420-6444