

My name is Lori Crook. I am a resident of Nelsonville, and a volunteer at The Hive, a local children's after school program run by the amazing people at Integrated Services.

I am here today to represent the residents of Nelsonville, because most of us were shut out of this important discussion. There has not been a single public forum about the proposal to close Hocking Correctional, a decision that if it happens, will be a devastating blow to our community, and we are already on the edge. I am disappointed, sir, that once again, a meeting you are attending has excluded your constituents.

In Nelsonville, 44% of our residents live below the poverty line. In Upper Arlington, by comparison, the rate is 6%.

Sir we are an incredible community here in Nelsonville. We are proud of our town. But we are facing a serious crisis, and that crisis is destroying the childhoods of a generation of children, as well as the lives of their parents.

There is a boy I used to know here. He was 19 when I met him. As a football player here at Nelsonville-York, he was injured during a game, and was prescribed 800 oxycontin pills per month. He was 16 at the time. Two years later, the presence of those drugs in the household resulted in his mother going to Marysville prison and his father committing suicide in front of him. And the boy? He became a full-blown heroin addict, having been hooked on drugs, by his own doctors.

Most of us in this room could tell you similar stories.

Sir we have orphaned children, and we know them by name. There are people who care about them in their families, and in our churches and organizations, but we can't handle it alone. And this is why you need to hear their stories.

I would like you to listen to the grandmother with no transportation, working as many hours a week as she can get at McDonalds, with two small grandchildren to raise, and a drug-addicted daughter to care for. And to the pre-K teacher who told me, we don't have a child obesity problem in Nelsonville, we have a starvation problem.

This community cannot withstand the blow that the closure of this prison would cause. The crisis is real, and the crisis we are facing is destroying the futures of our children.

Will you commit to a public forum that includes members of our community?