“I am glad to see this bill signed, because so many felons in Cuyahoga County can move on with their life and hopefully get jobs now,” said Forde. She also explained that in
Ohio
, if you are a convicted felon but no longer in jail, you can vote, you must reregister but you have a right to vote.

By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

CLEVELAND – Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) hosted Governor John Kasich, Senator Shirley Smith, and other sponsors of Senate Bill 337 (SB 337) for a ceremonial signing to highlight the importance of this new legislation.

On July 1, 2012, SB 337 overwhelming passed in both the house and the senate.

“Senate Bill 337, which revisesOhio’s archaic system of collateral sanctions for ex-offenders, reintegrating them into our communities, is a tremendous step in the right direction, and we celebrate Governor John Kasich signing this bill into law,” said Rev. Jawanza Colvin, Pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church and co-chair of Greater Cleveland Congregations.

Kasich came to Cleveland to sign SB 337 into law at the Elizabeth Baptist Church located at 6115 Francis Ave. Smith (D- OH District 21) helped make this bill a reality. With the governor signing the bill, it will take effect on September 25, 2012 but some provisions will take effect 90 days after that date because the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections must issue more detailed rules implementing the statutory provisions during that 90-day period.

Brent Bedgood ofCincinnati,Ohio, who suffered from his past arrest for failure to pay child support, spoke about how much this bill means to him. He fought back the tears, sharing his experience on how hard his life had been.

Having a hearing impaired daughter, he explained how insurance didn’t cover her hearing.

Brent said it was hard to sit down and talk to his daughter, telling her how the insurance company told him hearing is not a need.

SB 337 also modifies Ohio's Child Support laws by giving courts more discretion in calculating child support obligations of incarcerated parents and parents with a felony conviction. The legislation also allows courts to work with individuals who would otherwise have their drivers' licenses suspended and it allows the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles to create a repayment plan for license reinstatement fees.

One key provision in the bill is the expanded opportunities for sealing of criminal and juvenile delinquency records. "The bottom line is we have to keep people from going into the system," Kasich said.

"We simply cannot afford to have individuals cycle in and out of prison because there are so many barriers to successfully reentering the job market and their community," he said.

"In conjunction and aligned with the significance of this bill to restore those who have finished their sentences and are trying to take their lives back, we must highlight that in the state of Ohio individuals with a criminal conviction can vote once they are released from prison."

Erika Forde, project coordinator for the Greater Cleveland Integrated Re-Entry Project at the

Center for Families and Children, and Bishara Addison, policy associate for Towards Employment, work with individuals with their reentry back into society.

“I am glad to see this bill signed, because so many felons inCuyahogaCountycan move on with their life and hopefully get jobs now,” said Forde. She also explained that inOhio, if you are a convicted felon but no longer in jail, you can vote, you must reregister but you have a right to vote.

Andersonprovided figures forOhio. $24,870 is the annual cost to incarcerate an individual in anOhiostate prison and we have around 49,710 individuals incarcerated in state institution.

22,567 was the number of individuals released fromOhio’s prisons in 2011.

“4, 030 of these individuals leaving the state prisons are coming toCuyahogaCounty,” saidAnderson.

Elizabeth Baptist Church was chose as the host for the event because it serves as the headquarters for *True Freedom*, a non-profit that ministers in every prison in the state of Ohio, as well as providing hot food and clothing to the homeless on the streets of Cleveland and, also. s provides addiction recovery programming.