

In the Matter of Arbitration Between:

STATE OF OHIO,
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION
AND CORRECTION

OHIO CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES
ASSOCIATION, LOCAL 11,
AFSCME, AFL/CIO

Re: Case No. 27-05-(92-02-12)-0195-01-03
Spaun Peace, Grievant
Case No. 27-05-(92-02-11)-0194-01-03
William Whiting, Grievant

Hearing held: November 5, 12 and 17 in Orient and Columbus,
Ohio

Decision issued: December 26, 1992 in Toledo, Ohio after
receipt of post-hearing written position statements

Appearances:

State of Ohio

Roger A. Coe, Labor Relations Officer

Sharon L. Hilliard, Labor Relations Specialist

OCSEA

Dane Braddy, Staff Representative

Donald W. Conley, Associate General Counsel

Arbitrator

Douglas E. Ray

I. BACKGROUND

This case involves the January 17, 1991 termination of grievants Peace and Whiting. Both were employed as correction officers at the Correctional Reception Center (CRC) in Orient, Ohio, a maximum security intake facility of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, prior to their discharge. The discharge was based on allegations made by two inmates and others that, on December 19, 1990, grievants committed acts of physical abuse and struck the inmates. On the day of the alleged occurrence, an Officer Minard from the Mansfield facility brought two Mansfield inmates in from his van to the A & O area of CRC and asked if the inmates could use the restroom. He then left the area with the CRC lieutenant on duty so that he could obtain orange coveralls for another inmate who was to be transported in his van. It was alleged by the inmates that they were hit, slapped or pushed by the grievants while in a cell to use the restroom facilities and, in particular, that grievants struck then inmate Montgomery. Officer Minard testified that, upon his return to the area, he observed blood coming from inmate Montgomery's nose and that Montgomery had his cuffs off. Grievants and the other CRC officers on duty deny that there was any abuse and deny that Montgomery was bleeding or had his handcuffs off. Both inmates were manacled with leg chains, belly chains and handcuffs when they arrived at the A & O area.

After inmate Montgomery made a complaint the day after his return to Mansfield, an investigation was begun. The initial CRC investigation was concluded by Mr. Burford on February 15, 1991. Investigator Burford's report stated that there was no supporting documentation or eyewitnesses to support the claims of inmate Montgomery. He further indicated that it was his belief that "something took place in the holding cell, but not to the extent that was told by inmate Montgomery."

In June, 1991, Warden Turner appointed a Use of Force Committee to investigate the matter. The Committee, after investigation, concluded in August, 1991, that the matter warranted no further investigation due to inconsistencies in the Mansfield staff and inmate testimonies. During these time periods, a Highway Patrol investigation had been ongoing. It was ultimately concluded and no charges were filed.

In September, 1991, Capt. Augustine was assigned by Warden Turner to further investigate the matter. After conducting interviews in September and October, 1991, he issued a report dated October 16, 1991 in which he concluded that inmates Montgomery and Kirklin had been abused while using the restroom at CRC. He requested discipline against seven officers, including the two grievants. Grievants were provided predisciplinary hearings in November, 1991. Grievants were provided a Notice of Disciplinary Action dated December 10, 1991, advising them that they were to be

removed effective January 17, 1992. They were removed on that date. Grievant Whiting was removed for alleged violation of Rules 26 (interfering with investigation), 27 (failure to report violation), 42 (use of excessive force), and 43 (physical abuse). Grievant Peace was removed for the same alleged rules violations as well as for alleged violation of Rules 20 (threatening or coercing employee) and 44 (threatening or coercing inmate). Subsequently, grievances were filed, the matter processed through the grievance procedure and an arbitration hearing held before the undersigned arbitrator. Because of the number of witnesses and the volume of evidence, the hearing required three days.

II. ISSUES

Are the terminations invalid because of a failure to initiate disciplinary action as soon as reasonably possible?

Were the terminations of Correction Officers Shaun Peace and William Whiting for just cause?

III. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

Among the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement referred to by the parties and the arbitrator were:

Section 24.01 providing in part that the Employer has the burden of proof to establish just cause for disciplinary action and that, if the arbitrator finds there has been abuse, the arbitrator shall not have authority to modify a termination.

Section 24.02, Progressive Discipline, which provides in part that disciplinary action shall be initiated as soon as reasonably possible and that an arbitrator shall consider the timeliness of the Employer's decision to begin the disciplinary process.

Sections 24.03, 24.04, 24.05, 24.06

Article 25, Grievance Procedure

IV. POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES

The parties made detailed arguments on each issue. The following is intended only as a brief summary of positions taken.

A. State of Ohio

The State argues that it has proven that grievants did abuse inmate Montgomery on December 19, 1990, and that, for this reason, the discharges were proper under the contract. In response to the Union's motion to dismiss for untimely discipline and investigation, the State argues that both the investigation and discipline were timely under the contract.

With regard to the merits, the State points to inconsistencies in the testimony of grievants and other officers testifying on their behalf. In support of its case, the State notes in particular the testimony of Officer Minard who testified that, when he was called back to the cell, inmate Montgomery was bleeding and his cuffs were off. This substantiates the inmates' testimony. The State stresses that, unlike grievants, Officer Minard had nothing

to gain from his testimony and that he remained consistent throughout.

In supporting the timeliness of its investigation and discipline, the State notes the change in wardens, the inconclusive nature of the early investigations, the ongoing Highway Patrol investigation and the awards of other arbitrators interpreting the contract's requirements of timeliness. In particular, the State directs the arbitrator's attention to the October, 1992, Guard award by arbitrator Smith involving similar facts, the same parties and the same institution.

In summary, the State argues that discharge was proper in both cases and asks that the grievances be dismissed.

B. Union

The Union asserts that the matter should be dismissed for lack of timely investigation and discipline, pointing out that grievants were not discharged until 13 months after the date of the alleged incident. The Union points out that termination did not occur until ten months after the new warden came on board in arguing that a change in wardens cannot justify the delays experienced here. The Union further argues that the Guard decision of arbitrator Smith does not apply here for a number of reasons including a longer delay in the instant case and a more expedited investigation of a more serious charge in the Guard case. In addition, the Union directs the arbitrator's attention to

other arbitration decisions between the parties upholding a challenge based on timeliness grounds.

As to the merits, the Union points out a number of disparities in the testimony of the State's witnesses, arguing that the discrepancies are so pronounced and substantial that discipline should never have been imposed.

The Union further argues that the four investigations here exposed grievants to a form of triple jeopardy which is improper and demonstrates that the last investigation was merely for the purpose of finding support for discharge. The Union further asserts disparate treatment in that other officers allegedly involved received only suspensions of 15 to 30 days. The Union also argues that the grievants were denied their contractual right to individual predisciplinary meetings under Section 24.04 since all the correctional officers charged were grouped together for one predisciplinary meeting and allowed only one Union representative. This, in the Union's view, hindered its ability to properly represent each employee.

In summary, the Union asks that the grievances be sustained and that Grievants be reinstated and made whole.

V. DECISION AND ANALYSIS

Two matters must be noted before analysis is conducted. First, this is a serious matter involving serious accusations. Society expects a lot from corrections officers. Despite the tensions, provocations and constant risk of danger to which they are exposed, society expects

them to exercise restraint with regard to use of physical force. While they must control and restrain inmates, they may not cross the line and impose their own punishment. For this reason, arbitrators have recognized that proven abuse of inmates can be just cause for discipline and even discharge. See State of Alaska, 98 LA 545 (Levak 1992) (upholding 42 hour suspension of correction officer for striking inmate with fist) and Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Dept., 94 LA 29 (Strasshofer 1989) (upholding discharge of corrections officer for engaging in fight with inmate).

Second, it is obvious to the arbitrator that by the prosecution of this case after four investigations, the warden and the State intend to send a strong message to staff, inmates and the public that they do not and will not tolerate attacks of any sort on inmates and that they do not condone, ratify or excuse such behavior.

In reaching a decision in this matter, the arbitrator has reviewed the collective bargaining agreement, the testimony and exhibits presented at hearing and the arguments of the parties. The opinion will deal with timeliness issues, issues regarding the merits and other procedural objections.

A. Timeliness Issues

At the outset of the hearing, the Union moved that the matter be dismissed on the basis that the State failed to timely investigate and discipline under the requirements of Article 24. A preliminary hearing was held on this issue

and the Union asked the arbitrator to issue a bench decision. After hearing the evidence on timeliness, the arbitrator found the issue too difficult to decide without time for reflection and asked the parties to proceed with the merits. The Union's motion was held in abeyance.

Under Section 24.02 of the contract, disciplinary action shall be initiated "as soon as reasonably possible" and arbitrators deciding disciplinary cases are directed to consider the timeliness of the Employer's decision to begin the disciplinary process. This constitutes a promise by the Employer to the Union which ought be followed. The arbitrator is troubled by the delays in this case. Although management's position that the delays were explainable was well argued, there comes a point where explanations for delay may not be enough. For example, management was concerned with the thoroughness of the investigations conducted by Investigator Burford and the Use of Force Committee and their failure to clearly find facts. Management well argued, too, that the change in wardens caused delay. A problem is that neither of these were the Union's fault and all were within the control of management. Mr. Burford indicated that he reported daily to the former warden on his investigation yet no steps toward discipline were taken. The Use of Force Committee was not convened until months after the alleged incident yet no steps toward discipline were taken. The State Highway Patrol seemed to complete its investigatory procedures in August, 1991

although the case was not officially closed until the December, 1991 running of the statute of limitations. No criminal charges were filed as a consequence of this investigation nor were disciplinary actions based on it. It seems that the discharge is based on the Capt. Augustine investigation which did not even begin until September, 1991. It is not clear why there were so many delays. A contractual promise to initiate discipline "as soon as reasonably possible" may require more than was done here.

The arbitrator has read the Guard opinion relied on by the State. As the State has argued, arbitrators will generally try to avoid contradicting arbitration awards on point rendered by other arbitrators under the same contract. In this case, however, the facts may be sufficiently different to allow consideration of a ruling of untimeliness. Other parts of the contract arguably do not provide the Employer with relief. Section 24.04 provides in part that the prediscipline meeting may be delayed until after disposition of criminal charges in cases where a criminal investigation may occur. Here there seemed to be no criminal charges officially filed and, in any event, the State did not even begin its final investigation until after the Highway Patrol had completed its investigation. No prediscipline meeting was held until months later. Similarly, Section 24.05 provides that the requirement of a final decision on discipline within 45 days of the prediscipline meeting will not apply in cases where a

criminal investigation may occur and the Employer decides not to make a decision until after the disposition of criminal charges. Here, the prediscipline process was not begun until November, 1991. This is not a case about the 45 day requirement. Thus, while both sections recognize the importance to an Employer of resolving criminal charges, neither speaks to an Employer which does not adequately investigate in a timely fashion.

Ultimately, the arbitrator, while troubled by a seeming lack of urgency on the part of the State given the contract's clear requirement of timely initiation, does not find it necessary to rule on the timeliness issue due to the resolution of the remaining issues.

The many delays in investigating this case left the advocate for the State in the position of having a virtually unwinnable case. The impact of the delays will be evident in every inconsistency discussed below. In addition, delay has to render less credible State testimony by witnesses claiming to have identified officers based on photo lineups conducted many months after the event. Delay hindered case preparation for both sides due to the destruction of medical records relating to the reasons Grievants had medical appointments at CRC on December 19, 1990. This evidence would have been helpful. Similarly, the nurse who examined inmate Montgomery after the incident could not even testify, after these long delays, whether his condition was consistent with a punch in the nose.

B. The Merits

Central to a determination in this case is whether grievants committed acts of abuse on inmate Montgomery. (If inmate Kirklin was injured at all, which is not clear, he alleges that it was done by a correction officer not a party to this proceeding.) Given the delays before this case was brought into the disciplinary procedure, it is very difficult for the State to meet its burden of proof on this issue. Although the State has sought to show inconsistencies in prior statements of grievants and their witnesses, these inconsistencies pale beside the inconsistencies in the testimony of the inmates and others who accuse grievants. This is either because grievants did not commit the acts of which they are accused or because the system broke down making it impossible for the State to meet its burden of proof here.

First, the State had to rely on subpoenaed witnesses, many of whom have criminal records. Their testimony is not consistent and, in some cases, is not believable. The supervisor on the scene did not support the State's case. Although the State argues that he was part of an alleged coverup, a discharge case is very difficult to prove without a reliable eyewitness, a role usually played by a supervisor. The system broke down, too, in how the matter was handled by others. No reports were filed on the incident nor medical exams conducted until days later, potentially important evidence such as an allegedly bloodied

jumpsuit was not secured, and a detailed investigation was apparently not conducted by the Employer immediately after the incident, thus allowing memories on both sides to become muddled.

1. Inconsistencies

The arbitrator ultimately concludes that the State has not met its burden of proof because of inconsistencies in the testimony of its alleged eyewitnesses. Statements are inconsistent with each other and, in some cases, inconsistent with prior statements of the same witness.

a. Montgomery

Former inmate Montgomery was allegedly attacked by grievants. In his January, 1991 statement to Trooper Fleming, he stated that he was uncuffed by a 6 foot, 230 lb., white officer with sandy brown hair and a mustache who used a racial epithet. This person was never identified despite an apparent claim by inmate Kirklin that he had picked him out of a photo lineup. Montgomery then said that he was hit in the nose by a smaller white man and that, after that, several other officers started hitting him. When Montgomery testified at hearing, he said that grievant Peace, who is black, slapped him, that the unidentified officer that uncuffed him then slapped him and that grievant Whiting then went through the two of them and hit him in the nose. He stated that Peace then slapped him again. This is not entirely consistent with his prior statement.

In his January 16, 1991, statement, Montgomery claimed that the nurse who examined him the day after the incident told him his nose "was turning a little black and blue." The December 20, 1991, medical report, however, states that "no bruising noted."

At hearing, former inmate Montgomery testified that he had been in pain from the TMJ condition for which he had allegedly sought medical treatment on December 19 and that he told the nurse on December 20 that he had headaches from the slaps. The medical report for that date does not, however, refer to headaches but merely notes a slight swelling to the nose. More importantly, he admits that when he and Kirklin left the cell where the incident allegedly occurred, they were laughing and smiling. He explained that it was "hilarious" to think that they would help cover up the incident. It is difficult to see how he could be in great pain as a consequence of being hit and then be laughing and smiling. His admission of laughing and smiling also undercuts the written statements of the inmates in the van who seemed to claim that Montgomery and Kirklin were shaken up when they returned.

It is when inmate Montgomery's testimony is compared to that of the other alleged witnesses, however, that it further loses credibility. While there may be explanations for the above inconsistencies, they cannot patch up the major differences in stories.

b. Kirklin

Inmate Kirklin, with former inmate Montgomery, is suing the State over the incident at issue. His testimony lost some credibility at the outset because delivered in the form of a long narrative. In the midst of the narrative, he would sometimes have to stop as if to remember his place in a story and then resume. It led the arbitrator to wonder if he were recounting a story or recalling an event.

Kirklin's initial statement to investigators on December 20, 1990, was that he didn't have anything to say. The arbitrator does not find it unbelievable that an inmate might be reluctant to come forward and does not discount the testimony on this basis. Rather, it is the inconsistencies which followed that raise questions.

In his January 16, 1991 statement, Kirklin said that it was the black officer who hit Montgomery and who said "take your best shot." He stated that he did not see white officers swing at Montgomery. He said a small white officer took Montgomery's cuffs off. Later in 1991, he told the Use of Force Committee that a small white officer uncuffed Montgomery and that a black officer hit him. At hearing, he said that Peace punched Montgomery with a "sucker punch" and that Montgomery almost went down. He said that a white officer then slapped him and that a big white officer then slapped him. He said that Peace hit Montgomery with his fist once and slapped him once and that Whiting struck Montgomery over five times. This is inconsistent with his

earlier statement that he did not see a white officer strike Montgomery (Whiting is white) and inconsistent with Montgomery's testimony that Peace only slapped him and Whiting punched him.

c. Farmer

Inmate Farmer who was assigned as a runner in the A & O area on the day in question tells yet another version. In his January, 1991 statement, he made no mention of any abuse. In his October 11 statement to Capt. Augustine, however, he stated that Peace pushed Montgomery up against the wall and immediately punched him in the nose and that all the other officers started hitting him. He stated that the officers then took the cuffs off Montgomery, that Peace then challenged Montgomery when the cuffs were off, that the officers then put the cuffs back on and hit him some more. At hearing, he stated that Whiting took off the cuffs, that all the officers in the cell were hitting Montgomery and that they beat him from one wall to the other.

The one thing that inmate Farmer did say consistently was that inmates Kirklin and Montgomery said on their way in to the facility that they would get their cuffs off and "raise some hell." In his initial statement, he said that Officer Minard then told them not to get him on "front street" and that he was doing them a favor to let them go in. One of inmate Farmer's statements indicated that he told Officer Carter to watch out for Kirklin and Montgomery because they will cause trouble.

The arbitrator tends to believe inmate Farmer when he says that he overheard Kirklin and Montgomery indicate that they intended to cause trouble. His testimony about the alleged assault, however, only serves to raise doubts about the credibility of all the witnesses.

d. Inconsistencies of inmate testimony

Montgomery, Kirklin and Farmer were the alleged eyewitnesses. They disagree on most points beginning with who allegedly hit Montgomery in the nose with a fist. Montgomery claims it was Whiting, jumping between two bigger men. Kirklin said it was Peace who hit Montgomery so hard he almost went down. Farmer says that Peace hit Montgomery in the nose right away.

Second, they disagree on who allegedly uncuffed Montgomery. Montgomery said it was a big white officer whom he was unable to identify for the hearing. Kirklin said it was a small white officer, possibly meaning Whiting. Farmer's statements indicate it was Whiting.

Third, there was testimony that someone challenged Montgomery to "take your best shot" or something like that once the cuffs were removed. Kirklin says it was a white officer. Farmer's October 11 statement says it was Peace.

Finally, we can't even tell who allegedly hit Montgomery. Farmer says it was all the officers in the area. Montgomery says it was Peace, Whiting and the unidentified large white officer. Kirklin said it was Peace and then later added Whiting after an earlier statement

indicated he did not see a white officer swing at Montgomery. For these reasons, the arbitrator finds it difficult to hold that this testimony meets the State's burden of proof.

e. Minard

As the State argues, it is Officer Minard who, as the Mansfield officer charged with returning the inmates to Mansfield, seemingly had nothing to gain from false testimony and for that reason should be listened to carefully. One problem, however, is that he does not claim to be a witness to the alleged incident itself. He and Lieutenant Alexander returned to the cell area after being summoned by one of the corrections officers. Officer Minard testified that he saw Montgomery with blood running from his nose and his hands uncuffed. Lieutenant Alexander and the CRC corrections officers said this was not so.

A few matters are troubling about Officer Minard's testimony. He stated that he saw blood running from Montgomery's nose. At the November 15 predisciplinary hearing, he seemingly said that he saw brick imprints on Kirklin's head. Despite this, he did not seek medical attention for either inmate who were charged to his care. It is interesting, too, that Montgomery twice stated "I didn't notice any" when asked if Kirklin had an injury which he noticed. Nor did the record of Kirklin's December 20 medical exam contain reference to any injury to his head or forehead but noted only a problem with his knee. (It was his

knee for which he apparently sought medical attention at CRC before the alleged incident.) Thus, Officer Minard, whom the inmates referred to as "Nardy", seemed to provide testimony more helpful to Kirklin's lawsuit than did either his co-plaintiff or the medical records.

Not only did Officer Minard take no steps to obtain medical help for his allegedly injured inmates but he did not immediately report the incident. While he claimed that he wrote the incident report earlier than the date on which he reported, the two pages of the report (which look like they were written together) bear different dates. While delay in reporting was possibly because of concerns over reporting on other officers as he stated, it did impair the investigation. Too, it was Officer Minard who could have secured the allegedly bloodied jumpsuit as proof of his claim. He did not.

Also somewhat troubling is what Officer Minard told Montgomery and Kirklin when he returned to the holding cell. Numerous witnesses confirm and he admitted that he told them they would be going to "the hole." While Officer Minard's explanation was that he wanted to see how Lt. Alexander would react, this explanation does not totally cure the troubling nature of the testimony in light of his testimony that he saw Montgomery bleeding with his cuffs off and Kirklin with brick marks on his head. If this was so, why would he threaten the victims with punishment?

Finally, Officer Minard signed a July 29, 1991 statement to the use of force committee that he was "sure the cuffs were off Kirkland and his nose was bleeding." It is Montgomery who was alleged to be bleeding with his cuffs off, not Kirklin. While this inconsistency could easily be inadvertent, especially if the statement was transcribed by another, it is one more inconsistency. Indeed, all of the inconsistencies with Minard's testimony may be explainable. The problem is that he is the State's prime witness and the State has the burden of proof.

2. Conclusions on the Merits

The arbitrator finds that the State has not sustained its Section 24.01 burden of proof to establish just cause for discipline. The arbitrator does not know what happened in the holding cell on December 19, 1990. In part, this is due to the delays that occurred prior to the final investigation of this case. In part, and a related point, this is due to the numerous inconsistencies in the testimony of the alleged witnesses against grievants. The arbitrator is aware that Section 24.01 does not give the arbitrator authority to modify the termination of an employee committing abuse of a person in the custody of the State. The arbitrator does not believe that it has been established that grievants committed abuse.

III. OTHER

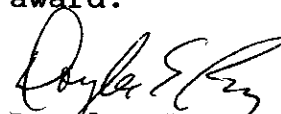
The Union has also argued that this case must be dismissed because the State failed to give each employee

charged an individual pre-disciplinary meeting but, rather, conducted one large pre-disciplinary meeting to discuss charges against all those who were charged in the alleged incident at which they were all represented by the same Union representative. The Union alleges that this violates the Section 24.04 provision that an employee has the right to a meeting before the imposition of discipline. Because of the above resolution of the just cause issue, the arbitrator does not reach this point which would, in any event, have required further testimony and evidence as to the negotiation of this clause and its past application by the parties.

The original discharge contained allegations that grievant Peace had sought to coerce Officer Minard and/or his brother, also a correction officer. The arbitrator finds that these charges were not proven.

VI. DECISION

The grievances are sustained. The Employer is directed to reinstate grievants and make them whole. The arbitrator retains jurisdiction for 60 days following the date of this award in the event the parties are unable to agree on the implementation of the award.


Douglas E. Ray

Arbitrator

December 26, 1992

Toledo, Ohio

TO: Rachel Livengood, Acting Chief of Arbitration Services
FROM: John T. Porter, Asst. Director of Arbitration
RE: Peace and Whiting Arbitration Award
DATE: April 27, 1993

The following are the unresolved issues concerning the above referenced arbitration award:

Whiting No OK until Feb 6
Peace 55.37

#68460

1. Missed overtime opportunities from January 19, 1993 to March 19, 1993 for Peace and Whiting.
2. Unpaid medical bills - for Jeff Whiting's daughter's broken arm only.
3. Appropriate classification/assignment for Jeff Whiting. He was not returned to his previous assignment
4. Roll call pay from October 17, 1991 through January 19, 1993 for both Spaun Peace and Jeff Whiting.

JTP:aag

State of Ohio

OCSEA

Re: Case No. 27-05-(92-02-12)-0195-01-03
Spain Peace
Case No. 27-05-(92-02-11)-0194-01-03
William Whiting

May 4, 1993 - Remedy Phase

1. Missed overtime ~~opportunities~~^{OR} opportunities
from January 19, 1993 to March
19, 1993 for Peace and Whiting:

a) 55.37 hours at the present
overtime rate for each grievant.

b.) Overtime opportunities for Whiting
will exclude areas which require
transportation until he obtains
his ^{Ohio} driver's license with full
driver's privileges.

c.) Overtime opportunities for each will
exclude areas ~~which~~^{OR} which require a
weapon until he is weapons qualified.

2. Unpaid medical bills

Management will pay a total of \$684.60 for outstanding medical bills concerning Jeff Whiting's children. Bills are to be paid directly to the providers provided that such bills have not been paid by any other source.

3. Appropriate classification/assignment for Jeff Whiting:

Whiting's current assignment will remain as is (A&D/utility) for up to 30 calendar days to allow him to obtain a valid Ohio driver's license with full driving privileges. Whiting will be given 30 calendar days beginning today to obtain such driver's license. If he meets that condition, the utility designation will be dropped from his assignment and he will be returned to A&D officer. If he fails to obtain such a driver's license with full driver's privileges within 30 days, he will be required to bid for available openings which do not require the driver's license.

3/3

4. Roll call pay

Relief is denied on this issue.

Douglas E. R.
Arbitrator

March 4, 1993

Columbus, Ohio

County of Franklin