



Jim Hughes

State Representative, 24th House District

Sponsor Testimony
House Bill 96
House Criminal Justice Committee
March 14th, 2017

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Johnson and members of the House Criminal Justice committee. Thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 96. This bill is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 316 from the 131st General Assembly.

Across the state of Ohio, according to prosecutors that I have spoken to, Ohio citizens are being touched or groped against their will by offenders who repeat their egregious behavior over and over. In fact, there was a recent incident in Franklin County in which a serial offender who has a repeat pattern of targeting women in public places such as on COTA buses and would grope them. His vast criminal record of nine prior convictions of inappropriately touching women and serving time in jail did not deter him from committing the act again, as he groped another female at Grant Medical Center. This repeat offender just got out of jail five days prior to his recent attack for the same offense.

In fact, the offender has offended again since the legislation was initially introduced last year. He was wanted for questioning in relation to a fondling incident that occurred on Ohio State's campus. The student said she was sitting on a bench outside of Knowlton Hall when an unknown male approached and asked if he could sit down beside her. Moments later, the woman says the suspect fondled her lower body before fleeing east toward Hitchcock Hall.

Ohio State University Police said a second student reported a similar incident that same day when another female student was working on her computer in the Ohio Union when she was approached by an unknown male who sat behind her and asked if he could charge his phone. Moments later, the suspect fondled her lower body. The student confronted the suspect and immediately left the area.

Local news affiliate WBNS10TV has reported on this suspect and his crimes several times in recent years. Security cameras caught him in the act at a Panera near OSU in 2013, and a library at Columbus State in 2015. He has been banned from riding COTA buses for doing the same thing: sitting next to a woman he doesn't know, and then sliding his hand between her backside and her seat. Earlier this year, he was arrested for a 10th time on charges of groping women in public. That is what spurred me to introduce Senate Bill 316 and now House Bill 96.

Committees:

Civil Justice, Vice-Chair
Transportation and Public Safety
Financial Institutions

www.ohiohouse.gov
77 S. High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111

Contact Information:

Office: 614-466-8012
FAX: 614-719-0007
Email: Rep24@ohiohouse.gov

These repeated patterns of unacceptable conduct have many asking why these offenders are only serving up to 6 months in jail for these crimes when they repeatedly recommit these horrendous acts over and over again. People are asking me why this law breaker isn't locked up for longer periods of time, especially since it appears that his short stints in jail are not teaching him that his behavior is not acceptable in society.

Protecting Ohio's citizens from unwanted and unprovoked touching or groping by repeat offenders should be a priority for all us to ensure these offenders are off our streets and unable to attack innocent victims.

What House Bill 96 seeks to do is to ensure individuals, such as the one I described, receive longer jail sentences if they are repeat offenders. Currently, R.C. 2907.06 classifies sexual imposition as a misdemeanor of the third degree which carries a maximum 180-day jail sentence. What this proposal would do, if enacted into law, is specify that an individual who is charged with sexual imposition on their third conviction and any subsequent convictions (convicted or pleads guilty to) would be elevated to an unclassified misdemeanor of the first degree and would be eligible to receive a 365-day sentence each time they are convicted of these crimes. I want to point out that this proposal **does not** raise these crimes to a felony level—they will remain misdemeanors.

Chairman Manning and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 96. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.