

Good Morning, Madam Chair and members of the Local Government Committee, my name is David Wells. I served as the pastor of Brice United Methodist Church located in the Village of Brice between 2006 and 2016. I am an elder in the United Methodist Church and serve at the pleasure of Bishop Gregory Palmer, the Episcopal leader of the West Ohio Annual Conference.

I was invited by Representative Hearcel Craig to speak with you today. I have been asked to share with you an encounter I had with the Brice police in the summer of 2015. On the afternoon of July 9, I was pulled over while traveling east on Brice Road. I could not see the markings of the police vehicle as it was directly behind me. Initially, I believed that I was being detained by Columbus police officer given that I was stopped within the Columbus corporation limits. The officer asked me if I knew why he had stopped me. I told him that I didn't know why. He informed me that my "license" had expired. I had a difficult time hearing him because of the traffic noise. I initially thought that my license plates had expired. So, I handed the officer my driver's license and registration paper.

The officer asked me to wait as he returned to his vehicle to verify my driving information. He returned moments later and indicated that my operator's license had expired on May 29th. The officer claimed that he had run my license plates through a data base as I was driving through the village of Brice. Given that my license was overdue to be renewed I was informed that I would receive a citation. However, the officer indicated that he would issue me a civil citation rather than a traffic ticket. When the officer handed the citation to me I voiced my surprise that I was being fined for a sum of \$250.

It finally dawned on me that I had been pulled over by a peace officer from Brice rather than from Columbus as I had mistakenly thought earlier. I also came to learn that the officer had been hired as Brice's most recent chief of police. Before I pulled my van away I called my wife, Cathy, and informed her of the fine I was given. Cathy serves as the administrator of our church's elementary and middle school. My wife shared that the police chief had visited the school several days earlier and stated to Cathy that he was attempting to change the reputation of Brice as a speed trap. Within minutes of my conversation with the chief, my wife paid him a visit and informed him that the man he had just pulled over was the pastor of Brice Church. He indicated that had he known that at

the time, he may not have cited me. My wife informed him that she knew I would not use my position to ask for special treatment. However, she reminded him of their previous conversation about his desire to improve community relations and that a \$250 fine for a traffic violation did not go far in meeting that goal.

On the evening of July 9th, I began investigating what a typical fine is for operating a motor vehicle without a license. According to the Ohio Revised Code 4510.12(A), the scheduled fine for operating a vehicle on an expired license is \$120, less than half of the amount for which I was cited by the police chief.

The following week, I informed the village of Brice of my decision to request that my case be heard through the Franklin County Municipal Courts rather than pay the fee of \$250. On August 11, 2015, my case was heard by a Franklin County Traffic Court magistrate. The prosecutor for Brice offered to drop all charges against me and I agreed to pay court costs.

My purpose in sharing this experience with the Brice police is to voice my greater concern for those who live and work on the southeast side of Franklin County. I served ten years as a pastor to the greater far east side community and I am keenly aware of the Brice village's reputation as a speed trap. However, my experience on July 9, 2015 confirmed for me that Brice has moved beyond the excessive practice of citing drivers for visible traffic violations. There is now an additional practice of using cyber technology for the purpose of obtaining incriminating information, as well.

There are members and employees of Brice United Methodist Church (BUMC) that have also received civil citations for violating local traffic laws. In one case, an elderly couple was driving to worship one Sunday morning and were pulled over for traveling twenty-eight miles per hour in a twenty-five mile per hour zone. Likewise, a member of our faculty had her license plate run through a data base and was pulled over for failing to renew her operator's license.

The community I once served struggles financially. BUMC is a partner with the mid-Ohio food bank and serves meals to over 300 persons each week. Of all the communities that make up central Ohio, the south east side of Franklin County is one that

can least afford these sanctions. As a Christian pastor, I am ordained to speak against practices of social injustice. The civil citations that are being handed out to the people I love and serve amount to what I consider to be a tax on the poor.

The Founding Fathers designed our government to serve people, not to fleece them. On behalf of those who feel inadequate to defend themselves I wish to advocate for them. Therefore, I appeal to each of you to do all in your power to see that House Bill 125 becomes law and I thank you for the privilege and honor of speaking with you today. This concludes my testimony.

**Rev. Dr. David W. Wells, Pastor
St. Paul Community United Methodist Church
8221 Miami Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45243
(513) 891-8181**