



MEMORANDUM

To: House Criminal Justice Committee Committee
From: Representative George Lang, Representative Bill Seitz
Date: December 12, 2017
Re: HB 423 Sponsor Testimony

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to present House Bill 423 today.

As you may know, there have been an increasing amount of civil demonstrations in the country. While many of them remain peaceful, some get out of order. As a result, law enforcement must step in to manage the situation, and find out who has caused the disruption. This has become an increasingly difficult job as many demonstrators are beginning to wear masks.

A few months ago, Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones reached out with concerns that if demonstrators are wearing masks it becomes difficult for law enforcement to identify who initiated the unrest. After speaking with the Sheriff, we instructed LSC to research this issue. LSC found that currently, Ohio prohibits the commission of a crime when wearing a mask by providing a penalty enhancement.

House Bill 410 would provide the same penalty enhancement (misdemeanor of the first degree) for those wearing a mask or disguise to purposely obstruct the execution of the law, intimidate someone in the performance of a legal duty, or prevent any person from exercising their constitutional or statutory rights. This, in turn, would allow law enforcement to do their job, and keep everyone safe before demonstrations devolve into violent confrontations. Similar laws have already been passed in 11 other states and the District of Columbia, and this legislation is virtually verbatim of the law in Massachusetts.

Again, we would like to thank you for allowing us to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 423, and are happy to answer any questions.