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State Representative Rick Perales

**Criminal Justice Committee
House Bill 496 Sponsor Testimony
Representative Rick Perales**

March 13th, 2018

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Rezebek, Ranking Member Celebreeze, and members of the Criminal Justice committee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 496 with my joint sponsor Representative Kelly who graciously asked me to join with her on this crucial piece of legislation.

We need to act to protect a vital and vulnerable set of workers. Bus operators have been verbally abused, spit on, splashed with hot coffee, punched, attacked with knives, shot, and killed. In December 2014, a group of four teenagers attacked a bus driver in Cleveland with a sock full of rocks “for fun”. In 2012, a Cincinnati Metro bus driver was shot while driving a bus with school children on-board in the neighborhood of Kennedy Heights. She maintained control of the bus and was able to move to a safe location before calling for help and being taken to the hospital for treatment. Just this past January a Cleveland bus driver was hospitalized after being assaulted during daily operations. In November of last year, a Cincinnati bus driver was assaulted and splashed with an unknown liquid. Thankfully, some courageous passengers stepped up to defend the driver, potentially

preventing serious injury from occurring. It is becoming more obvious with every attack that this is a trend that is not going away. We need to act now to secure the safety of our transit workers.

Beyond the dangers to the bus operator, there is larger public concern for the passengers on the bus, other motorists, and pedestrians. Everyone on or near the bus is put in danger when a bus driver becomes incapacitated.

Ohio law already allows for added protection for our school bus drivers. But yellow buses are not the only source of transportation for our students. Public transit authorities are responsible for getting hundreds of students to and from school every day and their drivers deserve the same protections. Other transportation operators such as pilots and train engineers are protected by physical barriers, while bus drivers are not afforded the same luxuries. Across Ohio, thousands of lives depend on the safe operation of transit services, and we need to be doing everything in our power to ensure this safety.

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezebek, Ranking Member Celebreeze, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer sponsor testimony for House Bill 496.