



Woody Fox  
Owner, Woody Fox Bail Bonds  
Testimony before Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee  
Substitute House Bill 439  
Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Good afternoon Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Woody Fox and I am here to testify in opposition to Substitute House Bill 439 as the owner of Woody Fox Bail Bonds.

I started my business 25 years ago after retiring from the Columbus Division of Police in April 1993. Since then, I have made a living ensuring that accused criminals show up for their day in court. We have had the distinct honor and privilege of serving as officers of the court – tracking down those individuals who choose to skip town when they are scheduled to appear.

I operate a business in Central Ohio. We employ 10 people, we work hard, we pay taxes and we contribute to the local economy – just like any small business.

About a year ago, we had a gentleman who missed court in Licking County for a \$2,500 domestic violence charge. He went to Nebraska, so myself and two other agents traveled 17 hours one way to bring him back to Licking County to face his day in court.

About a month ago, a man missed court in Franklin County. We tracked him down on Saturday through his sister – determining that he was in jail in Delaware County. Franklin County didn't know he was there – and we discovered he had three additional – total of four – pending cases in Franklin County. On April 7 – he will be released, and we will be waiting to bring him to Franklin County to face his day in court. Counties often don't share data about a defendant or have access to such information – regardless, it is the duty of a bail bondsman to find the individual so that justice can be served.

I am proud of the business we have built – and that's why I am here today. Because Substitute House Bill 439 will single handedly put me out of business, along with several dozen other business across the state, leaving hundreds unemployed. But, I'm not just here because of that. I'm also here because this proposed legislation will destabilize law enforcement in our state and put additional burdens on already strapped local law enforcement officials and local municipalities.

As law enforcement officials work hard to apprehend and book those who break the law, we have worked hard to ensure these individuals return to court after they are booked and released until their hearings. I have personally traveled to nearly every state in the continental United States to bring criminals to justice and ensure they show up to face the consequences of their actions. It's important to note that I have a singular focus on this task – making sure they return. The police officers have done their jobs and my job is to make sure that their work was not in vain. Additionally, it's important to note that my company – a private

company – bears all the costs associated with ensuring these criminals return to court. Taxpayers do not bear this burden – but they will if this legislation passes.

So, by passing this legislation you will be asking local law enforcement officers to do more work and you will also be asking them to increase the expenses of their departments overnight. As I mentioned before, we have traveled across the country to track down perpetrators who fail to appear. How many local police departments have the personnel to spare to be gone for days at a time looking for an accused criminal that they had already arrested before?

Our state is in crisis – from an overwhelming opioid epidemic that is hitting every corner of Ohio to record homicide rates last year in several major cities, including right here in Columbus. And yet, we’re considering legislation that is going to undermine the work that law enforcement officials are already doing and we’re going to ask them to do even more? And to what end? Why would Ohio rely on a questionnaire to determine if an accused criminal is a flight risk or not? Legislation that says you can sign your name and promise to show up – with these accused knowing full well if they just run away, law enforcement isn’t going to have the resources to come after them?

And, this legislation is simply transferring the cost of “free” bail from the accused offender to the innocent taxpayer. Right now, our bail system supports numerous functions of the court and law enforcement. Eliminating bail as we know it will force these entities to raise local taxes to fill the funding gap left as result of this legislation.

This legislation is an unfunded mandate. In fact, LSC said in its analysis, the financial impact is “uncertain and undefined.”

I’m here today to ask that you oppose Substitute House Bill 439 to protect law enforcement officials from incurring a heavy burden on top of their already enormous load and to protect small businesses like mine all across the state. Thank you for your time, I’ll be happy to answer any question you may have.