



Representative Bob Cupp
4th House District

SPONSOR TESTIMONY – HB 553

Good afternoon Chair Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony today in support of House Bill 553.

House Bill 553 seeks to protect Ohio's taxpayers from corrupt public officials by increasing penalties for theft in office. Under current law, theft in office penalties are capped at a 3rd degree felony for amounts of loss greater than \$7,500, while penalties for theft are more expansive. This disparity in penalty levels is failing to hold public officials who steal from taxpayers to the highest degree of accountability and must be addressed.

House Bill 553 addresses this issue by expanding the penalties for theft in office. Theft in office of amounts greater than or equal to \$750,000 would now be an F-1 offense punishable by 3-11 years in prison. Likewise, theft in office of amounts between \$150,000 and \$750,000 would now be an F-2 offense punishable by 2-8 years in prison. Under continuing law, anyone who is found guilty of theft in office would be forever disqualified from holding any future public office, employment or position of trust in the state.

Moreover, local governmental entities often spend thousands of dollars on audits to determine the actual amount of theft in office that has occurred. The Village of Barnesville, for example, once paid \$14,616 to discover \$16,156 in fraudulent charges. Under current law, the costs of an audit used to determine the amount of theft in office is not recoverable by the entity. This legislation permits a court to order the costs of a public audit as part of restitution when the victim is a public entity. House Bill 553 is supported by Auditor of State Dave Yost. I thank you for

your time today, and will be happy to answer any questions from members of the committee.