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SENATOR RANDY GARDNER

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Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 231
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Chairman Manning. Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee.

Thank you so much for allowing me to present Senate Bill 231 – Sierah’s Law – to this committee today. I am also grateful that this hearing also provides for proponent testimony so that the committee can learn why this bill is important to protect more Ohioans and assist law enforcement in making our communities safer.

Today, you will hear from Sierah Joughin’s mother, whose courageous example gives us hope we can do more to prevent other tragedies from happening. You will also hear from Wood County Sheriff Mark Wasylyshyn, immediate past president of the Buckeye State Sheriff’s Association, an organization committed to working to see Senate Bill 231 signed into law. You also have written proponent testimony from Attorney General and Governor-elect Mike DeWine, who has provided advice and support for this cause even prior to its introduction.

Fundamentally, we learned that law enforcement has no access to a geographic data base of violent offenders. When a crime occurs – or a suspected crime – time is of the essence. Law enforcement officers tell us that knowing where violent criminal offenders reside can help solve crimes and, even more important, potentially prevent an even more serious felony from occurring. Today there is no list. There is no data base. Law enforcement does not know where these offenders live.

Senate Bill 231 would establish a statewide violent offender data base that would contain the addresses of those who have been convicted of murder, attempted murder, voluntary manslaughter, kidnapping and abduction. The statewide data base would be available exclusively to law enforcement. It would not be a public record.

In addition, the legislation makes the information available to the public at the county sheriff’s office on a county-by-county basis. We believe these two provisions provide the right

balance – accurate, fast access for law enforcement to use the data base while giving citizens information they can and may want to strive to keep their families safer.

It is important to know that we made numerous changes to the bill – a total of 25 amendments. Most of them were suggested by initial opponents of the bill. We worked very hard with law enforcement, the Attorney General, prosecutors, the Ohio Judicial Conference and a variety of re-entry coalition advocates. I learned through the process in the Senate how important our re-entry programs can be in helping violent offenders toward honest, law-abiding lives. We made four specific changes that will improve and strengthen Ohio re-entry law.

Enactment of this bill is my highest priority in the next five weeks of session we have in 2018. I will sit down with any member of the committee to answer your questions and listen to your suggestions as we strive to complete work on this bill. Sierah Joughin's life helped make the lives of others better. Together, in the spirit of Sierah, Sierah's Law can help make Ohio lives safer.