

Proponent Testimony — Sub House Bill 318
William W. Cushwa, Jr., Founder/CEO, National School Control Systems, LLC of Hudson, OH
Before the Ohio House Finance Committee

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Chair Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on Substitute House Bill (Sub H.B. 318), defining the qualifications and duties of School Resource Officers within the State of Ohio.

My name is Bill Cushwa and I am Founder and CEO of National School Control Systems, LLC based in Hudson, Ohio. I am also honored to serve as a board member of the Coach Hall Foundation in Chardon, Ohio. Since the events of February 2012 at Chardon High School, I have devoted myself to education, training, advocacy, and adding layers of safety and security for students, faculty, and staff members in Ohio and throughout North America. As a former school administrator, parent of a high school teacher, parent of two school-age children, and, now, a grandparent, I am committed and invested in making any classroom setting safer each day.

Over the past six years, I have encountered and worked with individuals that carry the title “School Resource Officer” yet have none of the training, preparation, or background we are seeking to achieve with HB 318. Every few months or so, there is a national story of poor, reactive, and unnecessary use of force or judgment by someone claiming the title of “SRO” – who, in fact, never went through the unique training and qualifications process this House Bill is detailing. Every time that happens, it sets the true School Resource Officer professionals back several years and calls into question the role of law enforcement within a school setting.

I believe our every intention should be to prioritize the sequence of the words in the title “School Resource Officer”.

1. SCHOOL. We need to ensure that SROs have special skills, knowledge, and relationships necessary for serving school populations with understanding of child development, sensitivity to cognitive development, and keen awareness of trending social issues of youth.
2. RESOURCE. SROs can lead classes, educate staff about crime and justice issues, provide training on crisis prevention and intervention, and serve as guest lecturers. Spending time in the classroom also serves to build positive relationships between law enforcement and youth.
3. OFFICER. Having a sworn law enforcement officer available at the school diminishes critical response time in the case of a violent incident or other emergency.

Putting the emphasis on the wrong words and in the wrong order will be a tremendous mistake.

I believe that Ohio families should be able to ask a school or school district if they employ one or more School Resource Officers as defined by this bill as a way of performing due diligence on a district for their children or grandchildren. This is similar to anyone seeking out a CPA, not just an accounting major; a Realtor®, not just an agent; a Ph.D., not just a pre-med major; or any other number of degreed professionals. An SRO is a law enforcement officer with an advanced degree, not just a Peace Officer assigned to a school. If they are not a “School Resource Officer” as defined in Sub HB 318, Ohio schools and communities should adjust their terminology to school police, school safety officer, police officer, or some other term. The title “School Resource Officer” or “SRO” should be a clear indicator for Ohio residents regarding training, certification, expectations, trust, and all of the nuances of a diverse and age-appropriate educational setting.

With much clearer definitions on expectations, qualifications, and training, we can take the next steps to facilitate and fund this higher level training and certification process of the right individuals. Substitute House Bill 318 is an important step to take so that we can make Ohio students AND staff safer on a daily basis.

Once again, Chairman Smith and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today. I encourage you to support this important legislation for our state.