

Ohio House Bill 656 Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, and Ranking Member Clyde, thank you for allowing me to testify on this life-saving piece of legislation.

In early 2015, a coalition of law enforcement, public officials, and experts came together to rebuild the trust lost between Ohio communities and the peace officers that serve them. House Bill 656 arose out of a set of recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Community-Police Relations, directing the office of the Attorney General to create a database of all officers who have resigned or been terminated, and will require law enforcement agencies to refer to this information before a candidate is hired.

We know from conversations with local law enforcement leaders that rehiring of officers released for excessive force is a problem arising all over the state. One such instance brought Ohio into the national spotlight for all the wrong reasons.

On November 23rd, 2014, 12-year-old Tamir Rice of Cleveland Ohio died of a gunshot wound received the previous day at the hands of a Cleveland Police Department officer. According to a judgment entry filed in 2015, the officer mistook a toy gun for a firearm and fired his weapon at the boy before the squad car had even come to a full stop.

After, it was found that the officer had neglected to include in his application a resignation from a nearby police force, taken in lieu of certain termination due to instability and an inability to function during a weapons training exercise.

\$6 million in taxpayer dollars was paid out to Rice's family in a settlement, but there is no amount of money that can ever bring Samaria Rice's child back home. With all we know today, this was a preventable tragedy.

Of course, peace officers are a critical part of any community, and nearly all have demonstrated an incredible drive toward public service. However, it is the actions of a few that have led to the current atmosphere of distrust and division in some communities.

Having close relatives who serve as peace officers in the district I represent, I have spoken to many in law enforcement who consistently stress the importance of officer safety.

Local police departments must be able to protect themselves and those they serve from a deadly lack of information. It is our responsibility to provide the resources to do so. As the bill is not yet in its final form, I look forward to working the Attorney General's office, local government, and your committee through the legislative process to craft House Bill 656 into balanced, life-saving policy.