

Good afternoon Honorable Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on behalf of HB621, which, in my opinion, is one of the most important pieces of legislation that needs to be passed for the families who lost a loved one in the line of duty while protecting the citizens of their communities.

My name is Angela McDowell and I am the surviving widow of Officer Terry McDowell, Whitehall Police Department, EOW 8/24/01. While serving a traffic citation, my husband was ambushed and killed and his partner, Officer Eric Brill critically wounded, subsequently ending Officer Brill's law enforcement career. In my case, the shooter made the decision to take it to a shootout with the responding officers which ended in the death of my husband's killer. While the shootout was occurring in the backyard, the EMS personnel on scene put themselves in harm's way to save the life of Eric with no regard for the danger they were placing themselves in. This heroic act is nothing short of the selfless positions first responders place themselves in while protecting the lives of others. This senseless act of violence against a first responder whose only objective is to protect the lives of others and uphold the laws of this country is staggering and mind-blowing at best.

First responders put the needs of others before their own. As they say good-bye to their families before a shift, they are aware of the sacrifices they may have to make that day to protect the life of another. Our current culture has a divided line where our first responders are concerned. When you need help, you call upon them to protect you but then shun and target them because you may not like how the situation was handled or the outcome of that situation. They can go from saving a downing child at 4 p.m. to being shot at by someone robbing a store at 7 p.m. all the while being filmed, to ending their shift by stopping for a sandwich (thankful to be going home) only to be ridiculed and told you are a no good cop only out to kill everyone. These are every day occurrences for our first responders but they do not shy away from their duty to uphold the law and protect others, no matter what the cost.

They say law enforcement is a calling. There is little to no thanks that comes with this job. However, knowing that your family will be provided for should you answer that final call is all that they hold on to and are promised.

My husband answered that call in August, 2001. His children were 8 years old and 11 months at the time. I now was a single mom with two small children to raise. I thought things would be fine until I received a letter in December, 2017 informing me that I would no longer be receiving his pension but rather his retirement and that my income would be cut in half. What do you mean retirement? That's not an option he would have considered with a child still in high school and college to attend. He never had the opportunity, like his fellow officers, to advance through the ranks of his department. He never had the opportunity to enter the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) like his fellow officers, where they can capitalize and optimize their pay setting up themselves up for when they would truly retire from the department. There is no way he would have left the department at the earliest retirement age knowing he still had his daughter in school and that she would be attending college.

It is bad enough to be told by programs such as Victims of Violent Crime that you do not qualify for that benefit because that your officer wasn't a victim of a violent crime due to his profession. What would a victim of a violent crime be deemed if murder doesn't fit that criteria. And then to be further victimized because your death puts you at the earliest retirement date thereby slashing your benefit to 50%, once again leaving your family to figure out how to make ends meet and afford your children all the dreams you would have fulfilled for them.

Society, laws and governments change. New measures and laws are put in place and written to help the citizens of this country. The basic wording, amounts of the benefit and milestones within the Ohio Death Benefit have virtually been unchanged since its inception in 1976. We have had 7 Presidential changes in the United States, multiple healthcare bills introduced, minimum wage increases as well as cost of living increases but yet no changes to the Ohio Death Benefit since 1976. I am certain knowing that his family would be in this position should he give his life protecting virtual strangers, Terry might not have chosen this

profession. Can you imagine being sworn in as a police officer but then told if something should happen and you give the ultimate sacrifice your family will be put in a financial position because you will be retired off at the earliest possible date and the income they were receiving will be slashed in half and healthcare will be almost unaffordable. Would this be your calling?

Passing HB621 helps insure some financial stability especially when the children of the ones who gave the ultimate sacrifice are still in school. There is no fame or fortune in becoming a police officer but they all believe their families will be taken care of and afforded the simplest of benefits. That's what they believed. That's what they died thinking would be done. It is up to you to honor their dying wish with the passing of HB621.

Angela McDowell

Widow of WHP Officer Terry McDowell, EOW 8/24/01