



**State Representative
John Patterson**

House Bill 483
Sponsor Testimony
State and Local Government Committee
February 20, 2018

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice-Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 483, legislation that would designate the second week of October as “Ohio Covered Bridge Week”.

As one of the current topics of debate relate to infrastructure maintenance and development, there was once a time in Ohio’s history when this argument centered on the need for bridges—covered bridges. Given the natural topography of our state, with its creeks, streams, and rivers without such a bridge, crossing such a divide challenged the easy movement of people, goods, and capital. In their day, covered bridges served to facilitate the mobility that helped to spur Ohio’s growth in terms of settlement and economic vitality.

Our landscape was once dotted with these structures, a testimony to our collective ambition and vision of infrastructure improvement. But time and technology passed by our covered bridges relegating many of them to the wrecker’s ball, or in some cases, the torch. It is not known for certain how many covered bridges Ohio once had, and even today there are various estimates as to that exact figure, though it is thought that Ohio is second only to Pennsylvania in the sheer number of covered bridges. But one thing is certain, the ones which remain reflect on our ingenuity, our persistence, and our craftsmanship. Covered bridges, in part, span the divide between Ohio’s past, our present, and our future.

This is why, one could argue, that in Ashtabula County we host the Covered Bridge Festival—the second full weekend in October and why HB 483 seeks to establish the second week in October as “Covered Bridge Week” in Ohio. Ashtabula County is home to the longest and shortest covered bridges in the United States.

The Smolen-Gulf bridge, able to accommodate two lanes of traffic, spans the Ashtabula River and is 613’ long—twice the length of two football fields. The Liberty St. bridge, in Geneva, was built by our students at the county’s career tech center and is only 18’ long.

All told, there are 19 covered bridges in Ashtabula County, the most of any county in Ohio. Thousands of people flock to our bridges to see them against the backdrop of nature's scenery—the autumn leaves.

Therefore, out of reverence for the history of covered bridges and their impact upon Ohio's development, I ask for your support of this legislation to bring attention to our treasured artifacts of a bygone time that still impact our economy and engineering awe even today.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 483. I will now take any questions from the committee.