



Sponsor Testimony: HB 219 - Clarification of Speed Limit Law

Chairman Green, Vice Chair Greenspan and Ranking Member Sheehy, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 219, which would provide important clarity on Ohio's speed limit laws.

It is essential that our state statutes are clear when it comes to enforcement situations and instances of violation, especially with regards to areas of law such as driving that have daily impacts on people's lives. After a conversation with a constituent in my district about a speeding camera that was recently installed outside of Youngstown, I decided to look into the current specifications of our speed limit statute. It surprised me to find that the Ohio Revised Code does not specify when a new speed limit actually takes effect, and thus when enforcement can begin. It merely states that failing to abide by a speed limit is unlawful.¹

This strikes me as an oversight that could potentially affect numerous drivers who transition between interstates, state routes and local roads with varying speed limits on a frequent basis. It is also important that our law enforcement officers have the statutory authority they need to crack down on drivers who are operating their vehicles at speeds that create unsafe situations. HB 219 would codify that, for all speed limit areas, a speed limit becomes effective beginning at a reasonable distance from the speed limit sign. In practice, this would mean that a driver would not be liable for reducing his/her speed in response to passing into an area with a lower speed limit until a reasonable distance after their vehicle actually passes the speed limit sign.² This will provide commonsense flexibility for drivers. My hope is to clarify for motorists and law enforcement professionals alike that vehicles are not expected to reach the posted speed limit until a reasonable distance from the sign.

The language of this bill also includes some reorganization of confusingly-worded language in ORC 4511.21 (speed limit statute), which LSC requested to be able to rewrite so as to make it easier to decipher. The legislation does not make any substantive change to any meaning of that part of the Code.

Overall, HB 219 offers a commonsense, non-controversial clarification on speed limit law that I believe should already be in our state Code. In order to prevent uncertainty for drivers and law enforcement alike, we need to clarify the specific point at which a speed limit becomes effective. I'd like to draw your attention to the bipartisan co-sponsor list this bill has, and hope that HB 219

¹ The Code requires ODOT to create scientific calculations about how to slow down in anticipation of a lower speed limit based on car size, weight and previous speed as a part of its Ohio Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. ORC 4511.09-10 states individuals must be in compliance with those rules, but there is still no legally determined point at which vehicles must begin the process of slowing down.

² Exact language: "a speed limitation...is effective beginning at a reasonable distance from the location where the sign giving notice of the speed limitation is erected. The limitation continues in effect until a reasonable distance from the location where a sign establishing a different speed limitation is lawfully erected."

earns your support. With that, Chairman Green and members of the committee, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.