

September 11, 2017

The Honorable Steve Hambley, Representative
69th District, General Assembly of the State of Ohio

Dear Sir,

First and foremost, please allow me to thank you for taking a look and action on this important issue. I have been a peace officer in the State of Ohio since 1984, serving as a village, township, and municipal police officer, as well as chief deputy of the Wood County Sheriff's Office. I am currently the police chief and township administrator in Lake Township, Wood County and have served in this capacity since 2004. I have also served as a volunteer firefighter and as an elected member of the City of Perrysburg City Council, being chairperson of service-safety and personnel committees. I would like to offer testimony on behalf of House Bill 255, relying on the vast experiences I have held in these various positions during the past 33 years.

We are all aware that Ohio is currently being vastly affected by the worse opioid and drug crisis in anyone's recollection, this crisis on its own should serve as the sole justification of the ratification of HB255 as presented, however I feel that this is a much more encompassing issue than the drug crisis alone. There are daily issues that need to be addressed by the prohibition of township officers having full authority on highways passing through their jurisdictions. Distracted driving, impaired driving, and reckless driving all contribute to countless crashes on our Ohio interstates daily. In our situation, we are the first responders both with police and fire apparatus to tend to the injured, manage traffic, and hopefully prevent further crashes and mayhem on the interstate. In many if not most cases the State Highway Patrol is 20-30 minutes out for a response time, and that is if severe weather is not a factor. The sheriff's office would have similar response times if even available. This is no one's fault, it is logistics. Our OSHP post handles all of Wood and Henry Counties and a portion of Lucas County, sometimes covering it with 2-3 troopers. The sheriff covers almost 650 square miles with 3-4 deputies at most times, both of these agencies have their own issues to deal with. Needless to say, there are times that Lake Township police officers respond to the crash, investigate the crash, manage traffic flow, protect our fire/EMS first responders, and issue warranted citations, as the other agencies are simply not available. This is our job, this is what we are professionally trained to do, and we do it. What is not consistent is that we can do all of this when no other agency is available, but we are not in a position to prevent these sometimes horrific crashes.

I have heard that budgetary concerns could be a reason to reject this bill, that is not supported by fact. We HAVE to respond to issues on to the interstate, we are duty bound to protect the lives and property of citizens, as well as uphold the laws of the United States of America and the State of Ohio, to prohibit us from doing the same while we are up there is not consistent with the best practices of interagency cooperation and regional law enforcement initiatives. As always we can do more together than separately. Additionally I cannot and will not leave our fire and EMS first responders unprotected by a law enforcement presence, a presence that can ACTUALLY enforce the laws of the state of Ohio. Interstate highway collisions remain one of the biggest threats to our first responders, highway workers, and tow company operators, and usually these encounters with motor vehicles are fatal.

The suggestion that a township would set up a police department to glean the proceeds of traffic enforcement or drug interdiction to enhance their general fund is ridiculous. In Ohio, townships receive a VERY small portion of any traffic ticket issued, with a vast majority of the fine and court costs going to the State of Ohio and respective municipal court. There is no “money grab” in traffic tickets. Likewise, any funds or property seized in a felony drug case is mandated to be utilized for activities involving drug interdiction and is closely monitored. Drug interdiction by all police agencies remains a local issue, to be decided by the local elected officials based on the needs of the individual community, and with the support of the constituents. Trust me, there is no township that would have a levy funded police department always on the interstate, or concentrating their efforts up there. The local elected officials and constituents would not stand for it.

Thank you for this opportunity, I look forward to meeting you.

Respectfully,

E. Mark Hummer, II

Police Chief/Administrator

Lake Township, Wood County, Ohio