

BATH POLICE DEPARTMENT

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September 10, 2017

Honorable Members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S High St # 12
Columbus, OH 43215

Members of the Transportation and Safety Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 255 which restores the arrest authority of township police officers on interstate highways for certain enumerated traffic violations. This legislation would correct the negative impact of previous changes to R.C. 2935.03 and R.C. 4513.39 that stripped township police officers of their ability to arrest violators solely because the infraction occurred on an interstate highway that extends through a community. House Bill 255 restores the authority of township police officers to arrest and is vital to the safety and security of these communities. The legislation properly restores authority to police officers who are currently prohibited from enforcing certain Ohio criminal laws on interstate highways.

As the Interim Chief of Police and Township Administrator for Bath Township in Summit County, I am confident approval of this bill will help township police officers in the performance of their duties in several ways. First, township police officers who work in townships with population thresholds lower than 50,000 residents must rely on other agencies to enforce criminal laws for offenses that take place on an interstate highway. A section of Interstate 77 extends through Bath Township from State Route 18 to the township line at the Everett Road overpass. Motorists who travel this area frequently call and report a variety of emergency incidents through the Bath Township Dispatch Center. These incidents can range from reckless operators to impaired motorists and other serious offenses. Because of the limitations imposed on township police officers under current law, the Ohio State Highway Patrol must be contacted to investigate the calls for service, even if a township police officer is in close proximity to the interstate and could handle the matter much sooner. The closest patrol post to Bath Township is in Stark County, Ohio and in low traffic flows, troopers are at least 30 minutes away from responding to Bath Township from their agency. A recent opinion from the City of Akron Prosecutor's Office has recommended that Bath Township Police Officers not investigate any traffic cases or other related traffic offenses on an interstate highway and refer all matters to other agencies. This recommendation is dangerous to our community and counter to the philosophy of effective policing. It also places a greater burden on troopers with the Ohio State Highway Patrol who do their best to respond to calls within the township, despite limited personnel resources.

Equally important is the benefit House Bill 255 will have on the manner in which traffic crashes are currently handled on the interstate highway that extends through Bath Township. As a uniformed police officer for 27 years with the Bath Police Department, I routinely had the ability to enforce traffic laws and

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effectively respond to a number of serious cases on the interstate prior to the changes implemented in R.C. 2935.03 and R.C. 4513.39. Time is of the essence when responding to traffic crashes, particularly when the crash involves an impaired motorist. In these cases, there are certain time parameters that limit the ability to arrest an individual for alcohol and drug offenses. Having to wait for another agency to respond to a crash involving an impaired motorist, or a report of a reckless operator driving while potentially impaired, can be extremely problematic and, in some cases, may jeopardize the integrity of a crash or related investigation. The limits currently imposed on township police officers under the law also place the public at greater risk, particularly when a township police officer cannot stop a suspected violator for suspicion of impairment and simply have to transfer the call to another law enforcement agency.

Restoring the arrest authority of township police officers for certain traffic violations on an interstate and affording them the ability to effectively perform their constitutional and statutory duties is reasonable and proper under all circumstances.

I pledge my full support for the passage of House Bill 255 to the appropriate legislative committees and leaders of each chamber.

Sincerely,



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