

Written Testimony for House Bill 142 – Steve Wood

Good morning Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, and ranking member Schiavoni. My name is Steve Wood, and I'm testifying in support of House Bill 142.

The issue of concealed carry permit holders being required to notify police officers immediately upon contact in Ohio if they are carrying a handgun has been rather important to me for a very long time. In fact, this issue was one of the driving forces which pushed me to found the technology startup I'm currently working to build.

My company monitors state-level laws and legislation around the country in order to distribute information regarding specific changes to affected parties. One of the very first law subjects we started monitoring was this exact issue, thanks in large part to the fact that I had been hearing from friends and family members about how onerous the issue was for nearly a decade prior.

Almost everyone I know travels a lot. Gun laws notoriously vary from state to state, and your average citizen has a difficult time keeping up with these variations. When you consider that these laws keep changing as well, Americans really need to be checking on the differences every single time they travel. In reality, most of us rely on our guts and likely outdated knowledge since continually updating it is a rather onerous task for something that often sees no change.

This means that justice is best served by keeping the legal frameworks of contiguous states as uniform as common sense allows. Crossing into a jurisdiction with a particularly different law many might not realize has changed can be damaging for even the most well intended individuals.

Of the five states bordering Ohio, only Michigan requires immediate disclosure by an individual stopped by a peace officer that they are carrying a concealed handgun (MCL 28.425f(3)). The more than four times as many individuals who hold concealed carry permits in the other adjacent states live under a legal regime where they are, at most, only required to display their permits when asked for it by an officer. Ohio is clearly an outlier.

West Virginia, following a more strict interpretation of the second amendment, goes so far as allows the carrying of concealed firearms without a permit. Under current law this means a resident of Wheeling visiting friends or family a few miles away in Ohio could potentially face half a year in jail for something completely legal where they live, without intending or causing any real harm to anyone.

According to my company's data and mobile application usage statistics, of all the law subjects for which we currently have data and track, this issue of when one is required to inform police officers of concealed firearm possession is the absolute highest priority. It even ranks higher in importance than concealed carry license reciprocity, meaning people are more concerned about when (or even whether) they have to tell officers they are in possession of a concealed weapon than they are about whether their license is considered valid.

This holds true even though a large number of our users do not even own firearms, and consider this subject to be irrelevant. So many of our users rank this issue so highly that it overwhelms the ratings of no importance from our users who only care about other topics such as child restraint laws.

There are certainly public safety arguments to be made in favor of the status quo on this issue. Public safety officers certainly have an arguable interest in knowing whether a detainee is in possession of a firearm. However, the changes under consideration do not truly endanger law enforcement.

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The current version of House Bill 142 would still require those carrying concealed handguns to inform officers that they are doing so; it simply shifts the point at which this requirement takes effect to a more natural location the interaction, which is still rather early in the encounter. This bill merely makes what is already likely a stressful event for the individual stopped progress a bit more naturally, removing a punishment for mere forgetfulness or a genuine lack of knowledge that immediate disclosure is required under current state law.

I have lived in 5 states, and Ohio is the only one of those which has this immediate notification requirement. About 2/3 of states have no such notification requirement whatsoever. Even California, nationally renowned for its strict gun laws, has a less stringent requirement currently on the books than Ohio. House Bill 142 follows a national trend of loosening unnecessary restrictions on law abiding gun owners and makes Ohio's laws on this subject more closely resemble those of its neighbors through which most travelers are likely to pass. As a bonus, it makes Ohio a little bit less like Michigan, which most of us in this state are likely to appreciate on another level.