

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center for Government
77 S. High Street, 11th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111

Phone: (614) 466-8100

Fax: (614) 719-0005

Email: Rep77@ohiohouse.gov

Website: www.ohiohouse.gov



Committees

Ways and Means, Chairman
Agriculture and Rural Development
Public Utilities

Special Appointments

Tax Expenditure Review Committee, Chair
Ohio 2020 Tax Policy Study Commission,
Co-Chair
Study Committee on Receivership Laws

Tim Schaffer
State Representative, 77th House District

House Bill 155—Sponsor Testimony
House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
Wednesday, April 10, 2019

Chairman Perales, Vice Chair Hood, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 155.

In my district we have a truly historic war relic. In fact, it is a crown jewel of Lancaster—an authentic Civil War cannon used by Ohio native General William Tecumseh Sherman during the Battle of Shiloh and his famed March to the Sea through the South.

Like the Sherman cannon, Ohio is blessed to have numerous pieces of history on display throughout our great state. Stretching back to the Revolutionary Era, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the wars of the 20th Century to our current conflicts in the Middle East, these pieces of history remind us of the sacrifices brave men and women made in the name of freedom and liberty. They let us pause so we can remember how high the cost truly is to preserve the rights and privileges we enjoy as Americans.

These relics carry another high price as well—the amounts that unscrupulous private dealers and collectors will pay to hide them away from public view forever. Thanks is due to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, who are with us today in uniform, as they brought this issue to my attention. It is far from uncommon for collectors to approach cash-strapped local governments or cemetery associations and offer them what seems like a sizable amount of money for their historic cannons. For some of these organizations, it can be an offer too good to pass up. They can erase a deficit by liquidating one of their assets, which may appear on the surface to be a reasonable financial strategy to pursue.

However, there are flaws to that decision to sell a piece of history.

First of all, cannons, artillery and their equipment are often still property of the federal government, making the transaction an illegal sale in the first place.

Second, these war relics have a value to society that no private collector can match, a reminder to future generations of what it has taken to preserve our freedoms. Allowing that reminder to be forever lost to a private collection or melted down is a detriment to the public as a whole and a stain on the memory of those who served.

House Bill 155 will provide the necessary protections these war relics deserve. Here is what I propose in the bill:

- It would prohibit a war relic located on public property or on the property of a cemetery association from being sold, destroyed, relocated, removed, altered or otherwise disturbed by any person.
- Exceptions include:

- If the war relic is returned to the federal government.
 - If repair work is being done.
 - If it is being placed on a temporary display or if it is being used for re-enactment purposes.
- The bill does provide exemptions for the state and political subdivisions, but only if they can clearly prove their ownership of the war relic in writing.
- The legislation targets purchasers of these war relics by levying a \$10,000 fine against them. This is a significant financial disincentive, but it also serves to target their reputation as well. No reasonable collector will engage in this activity with the threat of this fine being attached to their name.
- On the seller's side—local governments or cemetery associations—their fine includes only the amount that they received from the sale of the war relic. There is no additional penalty. The fines for both the purchaser and seller would be paid to the county veterans' services commission the county where the relic was located. Half of the money will be used to preserve veterans' memorials, and the other half will go to the congressionally chartered veterans' services organizations that support our veterans. The State would receive none of the fine money, because that is not the goal.

In closing, we believe it is time that the State adopt legislation to protect these invaluable pieces of history from disappearing from public view forever—or worse, being melted down for scrap. We owe it to the memories of the men and women who served to establish and then preserve our freedoms.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to preserve the artifacts they will one day experience for themselves.

Once again, thank you Chairman Perales and the members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 155. We will be glad to answer any questions at this time.