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Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on House Bill 27. My name is Mark Kidd and I am Chief of the Pleasant Valley Joint Fire District. On behalf of my department, as well the over 1,600 members of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association, I would like to voice our opposition to House Bill 27.

Currently, the fire service has protection under the law where the municipality would not be liable for any damages caused by a firetruck or ambulance unless the incident constituted willful and wanton misconduct. House Bill 27 will eliminate this defense and cause municipalities to be susceptible to countless frivolous lawsuits that our local government will have to pay to defend regardless of the lawsuit's validity. The law as it currently operates properly weighs the balance of providing protections to both the first responders, as well as the citizens that we work to protect.

The proposed changes to the law would remove liability protections currently afforded to me and my fellow fire service professionals. The new wording would make responding to emergencies an even greater hazard for firefighters, emergency medical service providers, and police officers across the State of Ohio. This change could potentially make responding to many emergencies with lights and sirens too much of a liability for public safety to continue. In professions where seconds count, this is unfathomable.

Additional unintended consequences to this legislation could be that some drivers will look to take advantage of the system and search for negligence from public safety professionals. The financial impact to townships and municipalities, who would now be responsible to defend their political entities and employees against such claims, would be significant. Local governments would be forced to pay to defend these allegations, as well as bear the costs of increased insurance premiums, hurting the already stained finances of our cities, townships, and villages.

The Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association feels strongly that all firefighters, emergency medical service providers, and police officers should operate emergency vehicles with due regard for the safety of the public. However, this bill opens up Ohio's safety forces to numerous negative consequences. For these reasons, we are opposed to House Bill 27 and urge the committee to not support the bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions.