



**State Representatives Rick Perales & Sedrick Denson
Sponsor Testimony | HB 309 | House Criminal Justice Committee
Thursday February 20th, 2020**

PERALES:

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my joint sponsor and I appreciate the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on HB 309 today. This is a bill that has been introduced in previous GA's and is one that has been supported on both sides of the aisle in the past, so we hope that trend continues.

We need to act to protect a vital and vulnerable set of workers. Bus operators have been verbally abused, spit on, splashed with hot coffee, punched, attacked with knives, shot, and killed. In December 2014, a group of four teenagers attacked a bus driver in Cleveland with a sock full of rocks "for fun". In 2012, a Cincinnati Metro bus driver was shot while driving a bus with school children on-board in the neighborhood of Kennedy Heights. She maintained control of the bus and was able to move to a safe location before calling for help and being taken to the hospital for treatment. It is becoming more obvious with every attack that this is a trend that is not going away. We need to act now to secure the safety of our transit workers.

Ohio law already allows for added protection for our school bus drivers by making it a fifth degree felony for those who assault them on the job. But yellow buses are not the only

source of transportation for our students. The bill would increase the severity of the crime for those who assault our transit workers from a misdemeanor to a felony of the fifth degree, and make it a fourth degree felony for repeat offenders. Along with this would include a fine of up to \$5000 and the possibility to be banned from the Ohio transit or rail system for life. Other transportation operators such as pilots and train engineers are protected by physical barriers, while bus drivers are not afforded the same luxuries. Across Ohio, thousands of lives depend on the safe operation of transit services, and we need to be doing everything in our power to ensure this safety.

DENSON:

This is an ongoing issue in the State, and as the legislature I feel we're obligated to step in. Transit operators are not only responsible for the safety on those on their buses, but also those in other vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians. The bill also spells out a permissive posting of a notice to ensure that rides are aware of the proper code of conduct and the penalties for not adhering to the rules.

Ohio's transit operators deserve to be protected. The atrocities I've seen committed against them are horrifying. My office will be sharing video clips given to us that shows numerous assaults against drivers and passengers using public transportation in Ohio.

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, we again appreciate the chance to give testimony on HB 309, and my joint-sponsor and I would be happy to answer any questions.