

Thank you Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer and Ranking Member Leland for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 539.

I do not wish to reiterate what Representative Ghanbari has said regarding this legislation, but would like to stress the important role that this legislation will play in protecting the safety of Ohio residents, those using our highway system and our first responders.

At present, townships with populations of less than 50,000 have no jurisdiction to make arrests or issue traffic tickets on the interstate highway system. This bill would allow township officers, with populations greater than 5,000 but less than 50,000, if authorized by motion of their trustees, to make arrests for traffic violations occurring on interstate highways within their territorial jurisdiction.

A prime example of why this bill is necessary can be found in the ODOT distracted drivers corridor, which is found on a seventeen mile stretch of highway in Trumbull and Mahoning Counties. This stretch of roadway is contained within numerous townships with populations that are between 5,000 and 50,000. In this part of the state, county sheriffs are not active in traffic enforcement, especially on the interstates. Enforcement has been left nearly exclusively to the Ohio State Highway Patrol. The Patrol does an excellent job, but under some circumstances their availability is limited.

This bill would allow the township police departments bordering the interstate to respond to emergencies and enforce Ohio's laws within their jurisdiction. It would provide an opportunity for township officers to accompany their fire departments which are required to respond to accidents and other emergencies on the interstate. Furthermore, it will allow township police departments to work with the highway patrol to devise strategies to prevent and reduce the number of accidents on dangerous roadways.

Allowing these departments jurisdiction will enhance safety to the public and our first responders. It will also open doors for cooperation which have previously been locked shut.

I would like to thank the committee for their time and would welcome any questions.