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**Ohio House Finance Committee  
Testimony on House Bill 62**

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1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association  
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to testify on behalf of the over 1,700 members of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association. My name is Jonathan Westendorf and I am the Fire Chief for the city of Franklin, Ohio, as well as the First Vice President of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association.

Our roadways are responsible for the overall health and strength of our economy, transporting life sustaining goods and services throughout the state. Ohio's emergency responders rely upon our transportation network to safely transport apparatus, equipment, and personnel to the emergency scene, no matter where our services may be needed. Our firefighters, EMTs and Paramedics are operating in and around roadways for motor vehicle crashes, structure fires, and emergency medical calls on a daily basis. I assure you, a significant factor to achieving a positive patient outcome depends on a smooth and comfortable ride to the hospital. There is nothing worse for a Paramedic providing critical care to a patient who is placing an IV catheter into someone's arm or neck, or inserting a needle into a patient's chest to relieve a tension pneumothorax, or even trying to intubate a patient by placing a tube into a loved one's airway while the EMT operating the life squad must weave back and forth dodging potholes, or suffer the consequences of jarringly being bounded about while emergently being driven to the hospital.

With the expiration of Ohio's Turnpike Bond, Ohio's first responders are concerned about the current and future condition of Ohio's roadways and bridges. I recently learned that Ohio has the nation's second largest inventory of bridges, fourth largest interstate highway system, the third highest freight volume and clocks in with the sixth most vehicle miles traveled in the nation. It is no wonder emergency workers spend so much time responding to motor vehicle incidents on a daily basis.

- A 2017 report published by the National Fire Protection Association, entitled *Fire Department Roadway and Vehicle Incidents*, revealed that 14% of the total annual calls answered by fire departments nationally involved responses to roadways, with 27% occurring on highways where traffic travels the fastest. Additionally, 67% of roadway incidents prompted response by emergency medical services. In 2015, fire department emergency vehicles were involved in an estimated

16,600 collisions while responding to, or returning from, calls for service. Tragically, 19 firefighters lost their lives in roadway incidents during 2016.

- TRIP, a national transportation research group, estimates that roadway features were likely a contributing factor in nearly 1/3 of the 1,132 Ohio traffic fatalities that occurred in 2016.
- Notably, Ohio's 0.95 traffic fatality rate is below the 1.18 national average of fatalities experienced per 100 million vehicle miles traveled via the interstate system. Rural roads are less safe with a disproportionately higher rate of 1.84 versus the national average of 0.71 fatalities per 100 million miles of travel.
- Statistical analysis and experience demonstrate, highway improvements that include wider lanes, full shoulders, improved road marking and traffic signaling devices effectively reduce traffic fatalities and accidents. Roadway improvements decrease accidents, thereby reducing the need for emergency services. The less often our police officers, troopers, firefighters, EMTs and Paramedics are operating in the roadways, the less risk for death, injury or even damage to our apparatus. As traffic flow improves, thus decreasing congestion; fire and EMS are able to arrive quicker to emergency scenes and hospitals enhancing the chance our patients will have positive outcomes.
- Maintaining bridge integrity is also vital, as our apparatus are quite heavy. Since the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, we do our best to travel the most direct route to emergency scenes. If the weight limit of bridges is downgraded because of poor maintenance, our response times may be extended as our personnel will be forced to maneuver the apparatus to take alternative routes, which may delay our arrival. Such instances could be devastating resulting in loss of life, worsened injury or increased damage and/or property loss. Maintaining critical transportation arteries is key to our continued success in serving our communities.

The fire service continues to actively work to limit injury and loss of life in every aspect of our job. We also recognize the vital role a strong economy provides as income and property taxes fund the personnel and equipment needed to assist our efforts in saving lives. There is an alarming shortage of people entering the emergency services, so we directly benefit from reduced calls for service, and more efficient travel times and reduced distances. Once roadway surfaces deteriorate by 25%, transportation officials report crashes double. Roadways that deteriorate by 60% means that we can anticipate crashes to increase tenfold. Ohio's fire service will not be able to absorb those types of increasing demands for service without significantly deteriorating the quality of service in every aspect of our jobs.

We look forward to working with this committee to identify a long-term solution to ensure that Ohioans have access to safe and dependable roadways and bridges. However, we also recognize that there will be a significant cost associated with this project. The state must cooperatively come together and collectively address this financial shortfall. As many fire and emergency medical services are directly funded through local governments, we would urge this committee, and the legislature, to avoid any actions that would further reduce or limit the already severely constrained Local Government Fund. ODOT Director Marchbanks' recent testimony revealed that Ohio's financial shortfall will result in further loss of revenue to local governments, further compounding an already troubling situation by stating local communities may never be able to financially recover. Such testimony is quite concerning.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.