

**Ohio Department of Public Safety
Testimony of Director Thomas Stickrath
House Bill 62
House Finance Committee
February 26, 2019**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee: I am Tom Stickrath, and I am honored to serve as the Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's portion of House Bill 62, to fund the operations of three of the Department's six divisions, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and the Division of Emergency Medical Services.

For those of you who I have not had the opportunity to meet, I was most recently the Superintendent of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), overseeing the state crime lab and a team of law enforcement professionals. I also served as the Director of the Department of Youth Services under Governors Taft and Strickland and this is my second opportunity to serve as the Director of Public Safety. Earlier in my career, I served in a number of leadership roles at the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

I am joined today by members of my senior staff and following my remarks, we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the Department.

I am pleased that Karen Huey agreed to join me as the Assistant Director of the Department. Karen and I worked together when she served as the Assistant Superintendent at BCI. She has years of experience in state government including leadership positions with the Auditor of State, the Casino Control Commission, the Office of Criminal Justice Services, and the Attorney General's office.

I want to take a moment to recognize Col. Paul Pride, who could not be here today but who will be retiring as Superintendent of the Highway Patrol on March 15 after three decades in public service. I want to thank Col. Pride for his outstanding career working to protect the people of Ohio and offer him best wishes on a well-deserved retirement.

Joining me today is Lieutenant Colonel Richard Fambro. Recently, Governor DeWine introduced Lt. Col. Fambro as the next Superintendent of the Highway Patrol. He will take the helm of the Patrol in March and I know he will do an outstanding job.

I also want to introduce a new member of our team, Charles Norman, who recently began serving as Registrar of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Registrar Norman most recently served with the Hamilton County Board of Elections and has extensive public policy experience in both state and local government.

I am pleased that Mel House has continued his service as the Executive Director of the Division of Emergency Medical Services. Mel worked in the fire service for 31 years before joining the Department in 2005.

Finally, joining me today is Ben Suver who is serving in a newly created role of Director of Law Enforcement Initiatives for the Department after most recently serving as Special Agent in Charge for BCI.

Before I tell you about the good work we are doing at the Department, I need to address our current fiscal situation. In order to do that, it is important to share some historical perspective.

Prior to 2003, Highway Patrol operations were funded through a portion of the gasoline tax. That year, the 125th General Assembly, in partnership with the Taft Administration, passed House Bill 87 - the Transportation Budget for Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005.

In order to free up additional resources for infrastructure projects, that bill phased the Highway Patrol off of the gas tax and replaced that funding with an \$11 fee on motor vehicle registrations.

Chairman Oelslager, Representatives Skindell, Callender, and Hoops, as members of the House at the time, you may remember that bill. Despite what I am going to tell you next, I think that was a good decision. The vehicle registration fee has provided the Patrol and the BMV with a dedicated and reliable funding source for the past 15 years.

However, like any budget for operating expenses that relies on fixed fees, over a period of time the inflationary pressures from steadily increasing labor and equipment costs results in a tipping point.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, that \$11 fee in 2004 now only has the buying power of \$8. As a result, the Department has reached the point where the revenue raised by this fee is no longer able to cover the cost of operations.

Through efficient management of resources and a short term solution coordinated with the Office of Budget and Management, we will make it through the upcoming biennium.

In the coming months, I will be working closely with Superintendent Fambro and Registrar Norman to identify ways their divisions can operate even more efficiently.

Despite these efforts, it is clear there will be a need for additional revenue for the Patrol and the BMV in the subsequent biennial budget. Revenue increases are never easy, but we are committed to working collaboratively with the General Assembly to identify a long-term solution that will ensure the Patrol and the BMV will be able to continue providing the outstanding service that is expected by all Ohioans.

Ohio State Highway Patrol

Safety, service and protection are at the core of what our nearly 4,000 employees work toward every day.

On the front lines are the men and women of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. The Patrol is comprised of 59 posts that serve all 88 counties. State troopers make personal contact with over 1.4 million motorists every year and impact millions more.

In addition to the important mission of traffic safety, the Patrol is responsible for criminal investigations, security at state facilities, and the protection of state government officials.

The Patrol also coordinates closely with, and provides assistance to, local law enforcement agencies. As just one example, in 2018, 67% of the Highway Patrol aviation missions were for partner agencies. Missions include traffic law enforcement, aerial searches for missing and wanted fugitives, narcotics interdiction, and technical assistance for aircraft crash reporting. Patrol aviation services are provided at no cost to local agencies.

The Patrol is committed to removing illicit drugs and illegal weapons from our state. In 2018, troopers set new records in bulk drug seizures of methamphetamines, heroin, and fentanyl. Furthermore, illegal weapons seizures were the highest on record, with more than 1,000 illegal weapons seized last year.

In 2018, troopers made 24,514 arrests for impaired driving and through our combined efforts with local law enforcement, Ohio experienced 51 fewer OVI-related fatal crashes compared to 2017.

The Patrol has also been at the forefront of Ohio's efforts to combat human trafficking. It is now a requirement for all troopers to receive human trafficking training. Additionally, since 2012, the Patrol has trained more than 5,000 state employees on identifying and reporting human trafficking.

Bureau of Motor Vehicles

In an effort to ensure greater security and identity protection for Ohioans, the BMV introduced a new Ohio driver license and identification card in July, 2018. This initiative complies with federal regulations and is the most secure credential in Ohio's history. The BMV plays an important role in maintaining Ohio's safety through increased document authentication and verification processes that are an increasingly important part of the issuance of government credentials.

Beginning in October, 2020, only the new federally compliant driver license/identification card will be accepted to fly commercially or access federal facilities or military bases. Over the next 20 months, we will be working to ensure every Ohioan is aware of these new requirements and processes.

In November 2018, the BMV unveiled a new online driver license/identification card renewal process for military personnel and their dependents deployed out of state, virtually eliminating all of the document preparation and mail time.

There are currently more than a million Ohioans with a suspended driver's license. Many of these individuals have completed the terms of the suspension, but have been unable to pay the fees required to reinstate their licenses.

Thanks to the leadership of Representative Greenspan and former Representative John Barnes, who jointly sponsored House Bill 336 in the last General Assembly, the BMV is currently operating a six-month driver's license reinstatement fee debt reduction pilot program.

The pilot program allows for a reduction of reinstatement fees and even a complete elimination of the fees in certain cases. I am pleased to report that 23,838 have applied for the amnesty program in its first few weeks and 21,311 of the applicants have been accepted.

Division of EMS

The Division of EMS is responsible for the certification of more than 53,000 fire and emergency medical service providers in Ohio. The Division also certifies all Ohio fire and EMS instructors, provides accreditation and chartering of fire and EMS training institutions, and regulates medical transportation services.

House Bill 62 includes an important provision relating to background checks for EMS providers. I was surprised to learn that there is no requirement that an EMT or paramedic pass a background check prior to being entrusted with caring for extremely vulnerable patients.

On a regular basis, the Division learns of an EMS provider who has been previously convicted of a disqualifying offense but is still practicing. Just recently, the Division became aware of a certified EMS provider who was a registered sex offender based on a 2010 conviction for an offense against a child. The Division immediately began the disciplinary process to revoke the certification, however the individual had been employed as an emergency medical technician for 8 years before his conviction was uncovered.

House Bill 62 will ensure that all EMS providers pass a background check prior to certification and provides for ongoing monitoring through the Attorney General's Rapback program. Knowing that a significant portion of Ohio's EMS providers are volunteers, the Department has worked with the State Fire Marshall to identify a funding source to cover the additional cost of this important initiative.

As you can see, I am proud of the work that has been done by the men and women of the Department of Public Safety. I am looking forward to even more great work ahead.

For example, Governor DeWine has personally challenged me with finding creative new approaches on several fronts. We both believe that we can be doing more to make our young drivers even safer. The Governor has also directed me to identify additional opportunities to improve school safety.

Finally, Governor DeWine and I know that a strong partnership between the Department and local law enforcement is key to increasing safety and improving the quality of life in Ohio. In fact, just last week I had the opportunity to meet with 84 of Ohio's 88 Sheriffs at their annual meeting, and Governor DeWine joined us as well. We expressed our commitment to working closely with our local law enforcement partners, as we continue to grow our successes – together.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am looking forward to working with each of you in the months ahead. At this time, my senior team and I will be happy to answer questions that you may have.