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Good evening Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Tim Thomas and I am the Fire Chief of Fairfield Township Fire Department in Butler County, as well as a member of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association.

I stand before you today to express my concern, and the concern of countless other fire chiefs around the state, with language that is currently in the Transportation Budget that would allow a County Sheriff to take control of the county emergency management program.

While the language technically states that the emergency management office can be realigned under a sheriff or a fire chief with county-wide authority, it is important to note that there are currently no fire chiefs in the state of Ohio with county-wide authority. However, if there were we would certainly still object to this proposal because of the same issues that I will discuss in my testimony.

The function of a county EMA is to support all responders during an incident. By placing the county EMA program with the sheriff, a responder is now placed in the position of being both a responder and supporting the response simultaneously.

Not only does this create a conflict for the role of an EMA director, it is also contrary to emergency response best practices and NIMS (National Incident Management System), which has been adopted by Ohio. Counties that choose to operate with their county EMA under the sheriff run the potential of being out of compliance with NIMS and may no longer be eligible for federal funding and grants.

County emergency management agencies are eligible for the federally funded Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). This is a 50% reimbursement grant, which aids emergency management programs. This grant is very specific in its eligible activities (emergency management functions only) and it will not fund traditional, sworn public safety officers. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine problems arising with this grant if an emergency management director reported to a sheriff.

Without these emergency management grants, more local dollars will be needed in order to run the emergency response program. As we all are aware, local dollars are already at a premium in our current budget climate, and the last thing that any of our local governments

want in Butler County is having a significant financial strain added to our already cash-strapped budget.

Additionally, the county EMA Director plays a key role in the distribution of grant funding. We are deeply concerned that these funds will be disproportionately distributed to law enforcement agencies, particularly sheriff's departments, rather than being distributed to responders based on need. The sheriff faces a potential conflict of interest with respect to the distribution of grant funding.

The Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association supports the retention of a county emergency management program that reports to the county commissioners or an executive board. We firmly believe that these models best serve the citizens of Ohio and allow all our county EMA's to coordinate and manage all available resources during a disaster.