

**Substitute H.B. 311 Proponent Testimony as Introduced February 26, 2020**

**Before the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee**

**Randall J. Meyer, Ohio Inspector General**

Good afternoon Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Randall Meyer, Ohio Inspector General, and I appreciate the opportunity to offer proponent testimony for Substitute House Bill 311.

As some of you may know, I have been the Ohio Inspector General for the past nine years. As such I am charged with the authority to, "... examine, investigate, and make recommendations with respect to the prevention and detection of wrongful acts and omissions." The investigative authority of the office extends to state agencies, boards, commissions, and universities, as well as any person conducting business with the state.

My office, as well as offices of other inspectors general at all levels of government, conduct meaningful and impactful investigations. During my tenure, I have released 673 reports of investigation, containing 1,100 recommendations to state agencies. I have also made 330 referrals to external agencies, licensing boards, and prosecutors that have resulted in 92 criminal charges. The conservative dollar figure of loss to taxpayers identified in our investigations is nearly \$300 million. The full financial impact of our work is unknown due to the fact that many of our past investigations have deterred other individuals and entities from committing similar wrongdoings. As a result of the recommendations contained in our reports, improved policies have been put into place and operational shortcomings have been resolved.

Since the creation of the position of the first inspector general in 1777, as recommended by George Washington, the role of the inspectors general in government have expanded quickly and have taken a more visible role. Other than in military departments, the first office of inspector general was established by an act of Congress and created an initial 12 offices. Today, there are 73 federal offices of inspectors general. The trend soon spread to the state and local levels. There are currently 136 non-federal offices of inspectors general operating in 33 states.

Many of the offices operate at a county or local level. Substitute House Bill 311 offers Ohio counties viable options to create an office of the inspector general, or

to contract for valuable services provided by the inspector general through oversight of county activities.

The first option in Substitute House Bill 311 is the creation of the office of a county inspector general for a four-year term, subject to reappointment. The bill as written, would provide mandatory funding and would offer an inspector general independence, which is essential to conduct investigations free from external impairments. The bill also affords a county the ability to contract with other counties or political subdivisions to provide oversight in instances where needed. A second option within the bill affords counties the ability to contract with the Ohio inspector general on a limited basis. I feel that the experience of my office would greatly benefit a county that has a specific investigative need or that has yet to form an office on its own.

All in all, the bill as written, would provide counties with the ability to acquire services of an inspector general armed with the same traditional authority necessary to perform the job. Attention on a county and local level to ensure more accountability will provide a needed level of oversight to safeguard integrity in government.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony. I respectfully yield to the Chair for questions.