

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a retired Cleveland police officer. I worked in the Cleveland Division of Police for thirty-three years, most of that time in patrol. I am writing to express my support of SB 179 which would continue the requirement for Ohio motorists to display a front and back license plate.

During my career, I worked many years in high-crime areas, at all hours. I can say firsthand that violent crime is epidemic in Cleveland and has been for years. Cleveland is consistently at or near the top ten of America's most dangerous cities year after year. To most people, however, violent crime is little more than a news story. It's not real or personal to them. It happens elsewhere to other people whom they don't know and have no occasion to meet.

To decent citizens in high-crime areas, however, violent crime is very real and personal. I've talked with many of them and seen the awful, life-altering impacts—physically, emotionally, and financially--violent criminals have had on them. Overwhelmingly the perpetrators' transport of choice is a motor vehicle. As one officer said, "Bad guys don't take the RTA." (Regional Transit Authority, transit buses)

As an aside, may I add that many if not most of the people in high-crime neighborhoods want police to be aggressive against criminals. When anti-police sentiment prevails in the media or political arena, and officers are discouraged from pursuing criminals aggressively, decent people in tough areas suffer most; a fact which gets too little attention from people who don't appreciate the reality of violent crime.

In order to fight crime and help these citizens, police need all the tools they can get. A front license plate is one such tool. When I worked patrol, I was able to see license plates of oncoming cars as well as cars going in the same direction. In all my years in patrol, I've caught numerous stolen cars and cars wanted in crimes. I can't say how many were because I saw the license plate of an oncoming car.

Without a front license plate, law enforcement is crippled. As officers pass vehicles while on patrol, they only have a moment to identify each passing vehicle. With only a rear plate, an officer on patrol can only identify autos going the same direction by license plate. Oncoming autos cannot be identified easily at night—when crime is far more likely to occur--when body styles, colors, and models look similar. The officer's ability to identify suspect vehicles is effectively sliced in half.

The only unmistakable identifier on a car is the license plate. If a front plate helped police apprehend, say, a suspect auto in an Amber Alert, that alone would be reason enough to require them. Yet far more frequent than the occasional Amber Alert is the crime that is a daily reality for many decent people. The requirement of a front license plate is an invaluable tool to help provide them good police service.

I understand people with high-end, sporty cars don't want their car's appearance disfigured. That is no reason to stop requiring front license plates. Most people don't have cars like that, and for reasons I've already stated, police efforts to help decent citizens shouldn't be hindered to please a relative minority. If anyone wishes to drive with only a rear plate, he can pay for an exemption. An exemption fee would exist because the owner agrees to drive a car that is harder for police to identify and apprehend, and the public is at risk of being less-served, in case this car is stolen and/or used as a criminal tool.

I hope this testimony is informative and challenging. Thank you for the opportunity to present it. My contact information is below if needed.

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