

To the members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee, Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Conditt, Ranking Member Boyd, esteemed panel and guests:

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is John Moore and I am the CEO of Deaf Services Center, a 25 year old Non-Profit committed to serving the needs of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind individuals throughout 37 counties in central, southeast and northwest Ohio.

I am personally endorsing HB 115 for the voluntary registration of drivers who may have difficulty communicating because they cannot hear and/or have a speech or communication disability. This bill will enable drivers to voluntarily register the vehicles that they drive to enable the police officer to approach the situation more appropriately if the driver gets pulled over. It will allow protections for both the driver and for the police officer. The driver can feel at ease knowing that the police officer will be able to know what kind of communication access barriers the driver may have. The officer can feel better prepared to approach an individual with a communication barrier. This bill is likely to prevent simple pull over situations from escalating into major events.

Allow me to share an example. A friend of mine 25 years ago was pulled over for speeding. My friend is deaf and he tried to speak to the officer. Since his speech was not clear, he sounded like he was drinking. In fact he was not, and the police officer assumed he was drunk and pulled him out of the car, and arrested him. The officer only learned after my friend was taken to the station to be processed that he was merely deaf and had not touched a drop of alcohol. He was cleared of all charges but still carries a distrust of the police force that is tasked to serve us. It was a traumatic experience for him. Why did this happen? It was because the officer had no idea the driver was deaf.

Because of this, and other situations experienced by other deaf and hard of hearing drivers, I follow a procedure when I am pulled over. I keep my hands on the steering wheel until the officer comes and taps on my window. I then point to my ears and mouth the words "cannot hear". Then I roll the window down, and point to where my wallet would be and I keep my hands visible at all times. I do the same when I obtain my registration from the glove compartment and I make sure I do not make any rash movements to protect myself. Not all officers have experienced working with a person who is deaf or have a speech or communication disability and this bill will alert them when they have pulled over a driver with such a disability thus better preparing them for the ensuing action to be taken.

It is because of my personal experience and the experience my friend had to endure that I strongly support the passage of HB 115.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

John L Moore, CEO/Executive Director, Deaf Services Center, Inc.