

Written Testimony for Ohio House Bill 529

My name is Lt. Jon Via. I am a Firefighter/Paramedic for Central Fire District providing coverage to The Village of Smithville, Greene Township and Wayne Township. Central Fire District is a combination department with full-time, part-time, and volunteer (paid per call) positions. The reason I am wanting to testify to the committee about House Bill 529 is to attest to the importance of this bill for my district.

House Bill 529 was brought to my attention when the Village Police Chief and Fire Chief placed me in charge of finding a solution to a problem we are faced with in our community. This problem being the safety of the students within our jurisdiction during school hours, after school, and on weekends. Within our district we cover three school complexes; first being Green Local Schools providing services to approximately 1000 students plus staff for K-12, second being Wayne County Schools Career Center, a joint vocational school for 11-12 grade with a preschool center and adult education center, servicing approximately 500 students plus staff, third being a last chance school for our county which has approximately 100 students plus staff. On any given weekday the fire department has on staff four Firefighter/EMT's (ranging from a basic to medic), one being the Fire Chief and the police department has on staff two police officers; one of which is the Chief and the other is the School Resource Officer.

In order to show how House Bill 529 will add an element of safety to the community, I must first step back and explain the situation that arose that set into motion the need to find a way to provide increased safety to our community. As earlier stated Green Local Schools, providing education to approximately 1000 students, set up an active shooter drill with the police department and fire department. The drill was initiated with a simulated 911 call reporting a shooter within the school building. Response was immediately initiated by the on-duty staff at the departments, to include two Police Officers and four Firefighter/EMT's, one of which was called in early for the drill. The Police Officers went into the building without any Firefighter/EMT's for medical triage support and outside we had unarmed Firefighter/EMT's along with some village maintenance employees providing security, on average it would take a minimum of 15 minutes to get other Law Enforcement and Fire Department assistance. Once the officers had the scene secure EMS was permitted to enter the building and begin to triage and treat the victims. While police officers had located the first victim in less than 5 minutes upon entering the building, it was 19 minutes before the first victim was able to receive medical attention. Had we as Firefighters/EMT's been armed, we could have been at the first victim in that 5 minutes. Now for this drill we did not simulate any victims being shot, this was done intentionally knowing that at 19 minutes those victims would be dead and we would have to answer to school staff and parents wanting to know why we could not get to their kids in time to save them. In a meeting following this drill this point was discussed and we came to the realization that as things sit we would have more body recoveries then lives saved in a real case scenario, due to the delay of medical attention, we all pray this never happens.

Most incidents of this nature last between 15 to 20 minutes and most victims, if shot, bleed out in 5 to 10 minutes. We know, no matter what we are allowed to do, we can't save everyone but allowing us to go in with the initial team and support our police department gets us to victims faster and that will allow us to save more. House Bill 592 will also add armed security outside of the school. We understand that there are programs where Medics go in with SWAT teams and on those teams an officer is assigned to the medics that go in. With larger departments and larger staff numbers this is a possibility; however,

we don't have the numbers/staffing for that scenario. If we would have sent in a Firefighter/EMT with an officer, the officer would have to stop at the victim and remain to provide protection to the EMT leaving one less to search for the gun man. House Bill 592 would allow a two-man team, made up of one officer and one EMT, to enter the building and if a victim was located the EMT would be able to remain with the victim to provide treatment while the officer continued on to search for the gun man.

House Bill 592 allows for small departments, like ours, to arm Firefighter/EMT's without having to attend the full Police Academy, which can take upwards of a year. In the case of Central Fire District, attending of the academy would take four to eight Firefighters (full-time and part-time) off work to go to the training which means not only do we have to pay for the training but have to pay for additional staffing to cover the shifts of those in the training.

I cannot speak for all departments but House Bill 592 would benefit Central Fire District and the community it services in ways that up until now we didn't think possible. It will provide increased safety to our residents, to kids that come into the district, and the officers we will be assisting.

With House bill 529 there is mandatory training spelled out in the bill. On top of that there will be mandatory yearly qualification and additional training with the officers of our Police Department. These are things that we agree with in the bill there should always be away of checks and balances.