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Proponent Testimony
HB 318

Thank you Chairman Brennan, Representatives LaTourette and Patterson, et al

I'm here today to speak about School Resource Officers (SROs) and the important role they play in our public school system.

Five years ago, early in the morning on Feb. 27th our lives in Chardon were forever changed when HS student TJ Lane opened fire in the cafeteria just as classes were beginning, killing three students and injuring three others, one of whom is permanently disabled. Although the HS had conducted a trial emergency run several years prior to help us prepare for such an incident, we did not have an SRO in place. Thank goodness Coach Frank Hall was there that day to chase Lane out of the building thereby preventing further injuries and loss of lives.

Since that time, the City of Chardon, Chardon Township, and Chardon Local Schools together have committed to funding an SRO position. Currently that role is held by Chardon PO Mike Shaw who spends 9 months of the year at the schools and works in the summer months for the City. If he were here today, Mike would tell you that he functions as part PO, part educator, and part counselor. He's in the schools not only as a crime deterrent, but also to keep our children safe and to help them make good, informed choices.

The PO part of his job deals with things like handling criminal cases that occur at school during the day including harassment, theft, assault, threats, and sex-related crimes involving social media. In addition, there are other non-criminal issues that arise such as damage to vehicles, parking problems, and lockouts.

The educator part of his job is in the classroom and includes teaching students about drug prevention, the dangers of alcohol and tobacco, and safe driving practices. He's invited to speak at criminal justice classes on "Ask a Cop" where students get a "real world" version of what it's like on the job. Government classes use him to assist mock police officers who try to build cases in mock trials against other students. Parents even get a chance to be educated with a "Hidden in Plain Sight" presentation to address the signs and signals of dangerous teenage behavior.

The counselor part of the SRO job involves students seeing him as someone they can go to with their many concerns, for assistance in dealing with things like cyber bullying, conflicts at school and home, and addressing signs of depression or suicide.

This is Mike's 6th year on the job with Chardon Schools as an SRO. He's the Vice President of the Ohio School Resource Officer's Association which establishes training and guidelines for SROs. He also hosts two regional meetings at Chardon HS which is attended by 20-30 SROs in NE Ohio.

The results of having an SRO are not necessarily something that can be measured, graphed, or documented. But those of us in Chardon know that having an SRO in our public schools contributes to our students' physical safety, their mental health, and to their growth as contributing members of our society. We call ourselves Chardon Strong because together we are committed to keeping our students and our schools safe.

I fully support Rep LaTourette and Patterson in their endeavor to promote SRO standards and I thank you for allowing me to testify before you here today.