

December 9, 2018

RE: Senate Bill 296

To Whom It May Concern,

I am the widow of Deputy Brandy Winfield, Marion County Sheriff's Office, murdered in the line of duty October 4, 2004. I implore you to support AM SB No 296. This legislation provides affordable health insurance and increased Ohio Death benefits for survivors of first responders killed in the line of duty.

The Ohio Death Benefit has not been updated since enacted in 1976. It is long overdue to be brought in line with current pension trends including DROP/PLOP plans. This legislation will take us from the minimum retirement age/service to the maximum offered in DROP programs. It also brings us in line with disability benefits when reduced instead of the 50% it was before. Our spouses would have most likely entered into these programs if given the chance. These options were taken from us along with our futures together.

Further this bill will ensure affordable healthcare coverage for the spouses and children of these officers. As a member of OPERS I lost my healthcare coverage in a phase out program. Myself and my children can no longer participate in OPERS healthcare because my husband did not have 20 years of service, the magic number OPERS believes is necessary to qualify. He was never given a choice in his years of service as a punk with a gun chose that for him after 10 years of faithful service to his community. He vowed his life the day he walked out of the academy and took an oath to serve but OPERS believes that isn't enough to be eligible. During that phase out program, I watched my healthcare costs rise every year with increasing premiums and deductibles I had to live pay check to pay check hoping my kids didn't need any treatment. I sold our home to reduce our monthly budget and took a job where I could provide healthcare to my children. I am still paying off some of those healthcare bills today that weren't covered because of high deductibles. My son's ADHD medication was over \$300 a month alone coupled with \$904 a month premium, those are budget changes you just can't compensate for and I found myself in debt.

My husband was shot on a lonely dark road in the middle of the night. I drove myself and my kids to the emergency room to find out he was shot for nothing more than giving a drunk man a ride home in the middle of the night. My children were babies just 1 and 3 years old when I had to shatter their whole worlds telling them a bad guy shot their daddy and he would never come home. The man who shot him smirked at me in the courtroom and continues to defy authority in prison being moved to Lucasville for continuous violations. Yet he is provided healthcare free if anything happens to him, he is given free room and board, he is offered an education, free rehabilitation he cares nothing about, and all the counseling he could ever ask for to make him a better citizen. Meanwhile I set up payment plans to cover my children's injuries and illnesses, I pay outrageous premiums to ensure they receive care, I scrimp and save to make sure they will be provided basic benefits. While he could care less about counseling, I paid \$65,000 out of pocket to get the best counseling available in wilderness therapy for my struggling teenage son coming to terms with the anger he feels growing up without his father. Therapy not covered by any insurance but one that helped my son more than any of the insurance-based therapy I muddled through for years.

My husband went to his grave with the firm belief that if he should fall in the line of duty his family would be provided for by his community and state. He was willing to be that thin blue line that stood between the evil of society and the common law-abiding citizens. He took an oath to honor and

serve his community, he honored that oath with his life. He never knew how we would struggle without him and I often question if he would still believe it was worth it if he watched us now. However, it was part of who he was as a person. He was proud to serve and I have raised his sons to be proud. My oldest plans to follow in his footsteps, even knowing what we sacrificed. We ask that you honor these officers by voting to support the family they left behind.

Sincerely,

Sara Winfield

Surviving Spouse

Deputy Brandy Winfield

Marion County Sheriff's Office

EOW 10/14/04