

October 23, 2017

The Honorable Joe Uecker
Chairman, Local Government, Public Safety
and Veterans Affairs Committee
Ohio Senate
Senate Office Building
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Uecker:

I am writing to you on behalf the Ohio Association of Broadcasters (OAB), which represents local radio and television stations serving communities throughout the state. I understand that H.B. 8 is scheduled for a possible vote tomorrow in the Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee.

The OAB shares the concerns raised by the Ohio News Media Association (ONMA). Passage of H.B. 8 would impede the ability of journalists to accurately investigate and report on accidents involving school buses. Stories involving children are emotional and of great interest to all communities, large and small. It is critically important that these stories are based on fact – not rumor or hearsay – to ensure that those responsible are held accountable and to inform policy decisions made in response to an incident. Contacting families may be necessary to confirm information, and newsrooms and reporters are sensitive to special considerations needed with these stories.

Additionally, as ONMA executive director Dennis Hetzel noted in his testimony before your committee, H.B. 8 has the potential to set a precedent that contradicts Ohio's long-standing case law that initial police reports are public records. This could significantly undermine the ability of journalists to access important and necessary information in many situations.

We support the amendments to H.B. 8 requested by the ONMA. The first amendment would allow journalists to access the complete report of an accident involving a school bus – two options have been offered to provide such access. The second amendment removes the HIPAA-related language that was recently added to the bill, which is unnecessary given that HIPAA already provides broad protection for health-related information.

We urge the committee to adopt these amendments. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Christine H. Merritt
President

c: Members of Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee