

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Schiavoni, and members of the Senate Committee for Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today and thank you to Representatives Brigid Kelly and Jonathan Dever for proposing this Bill to honor my longtime friend and coworker Sonny Kim.

My name is Buddy Blankenship. I am a Police Specialist and 28 year veteran of the Cincinnati Police Department.

On the morning of June 19th 2015 Officer Sonny Kim was shot to death while investigating a man with a gun run in the Madisonville neighborhood of the City of Cincinnati. Sonny had served this area of our city for almost all of his nearly 28 years as a Cincinnati Police Officer. Sonny was a very capable, experienced, and skilled police officer and public servant to the City of Cincinnati and especially to the Madisonville Community.

Sonny's police personnel jacket is filled with commendations and letters of appreciation from members of our community. Sonny's accolades, and there are many, range from talking armed and barricaded suspects into peaceful surrender, to chasing down car thieves, to rescuing a man attempting suicide by jumping from a bridge into the Ohio River. Sonny loved the City of Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Police Department. From the moment he entered our police academy he was determined to learn from and pattern himself after the finest police officers in the department. On that horrible day both our police department and our city suffered a tremendous loss. There is no doubt Sonny was the best of the best of the Cincinnati Police Department.

I came to know Sonny at the University of Cincinnati before either of us became police officers. It is the friend whom I matured with and came to love and respect so much I would like to spend the rest of my time speaking about this morning.

What immediately drew me to Sonny was his ability to engage with people. Within moments he could turn a complete stranger into a friend. We could go almost anywhere in the city and there would be someone there Sonny could count as a friend. As I stated in Sonny's eulogy, "Being Sonny's friend opened the door to experiences and friendships I almost certainly would have otherwise passed on. Sonny helped me to see the value of opening your heart to all the different types of people our city had to offer."

Sonny carried the same passion that drove him to be the best of the best in the police department out into the community. He set up a Dojo where he taught the discipline and composure necessary to learn the art of Karate to both children and adults, all the while demonstrating that those qualities could be married with a caring, kind, heart and a sense of humor. Beyond Sonny's Dojo he provided the same opportunity for many, many, at risk kids in our city through the volunteering and mentoring he did with youth groups.

As Sonny and I grew older, eventually married, and started families his devotion as a husband and father were apparent. Sonny's father and mother had immigrated to Cincinnati from South Korea when Sonny

was 8 years old. It was through his family's friends still in Korea that Sonny ultimately met Jessica, the girl who would later become Sonny's wife. Jessica was new to the United States. So new she did not speak English well at all. Sonny watched over and protected Jessica while helping her to adjust and become a strong and independent American at the same time. Sonny saw to it that what could have been a very unfamiliar and unsettling place became the same warm and inviting Cincinnati Sonny had come to love so many years before. Sonny and Jessica had three boys and it is through these young men that both Sonny's character and legacy are so richly displayed. I will again reach back to Sonny's eulogy when I said: "Sonny and Jessica have already gone a long way into creating three fine young men. Young men who will no doubt continue to enhance and change lives for the better for years to come. Young men who already have and will continue to make their father so very proud."

The way Jessica and the boys have responded in the now nearly three years after Sonny's murder is nothing less than astounding and testament to the strength and character Sonny instilled in his family. Each of them has pressed forward as solid, outgoing, and valuable members of our community and there is no doubt they will continue to add to Sonny's legacy.

Dedicating this portion of I-71 that passes through the community Sonny served is a great honor and another step toward seeing Sonny's legacy of strength and discipline tempered with kindness and compassion is remembered. Such an honor should always be reserved for the best of the best, a true hero. Sonny both met and exceeded this mark in our police department, in the community, and as a husband and father. It would be my hope the renaming of this portion of highway might inspire those passing by to take a moment, learn about one of our city's heroes, and maybe even be inspired to live life with some of the same purpose and drive that Sonny lived his life.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today and your time in considering the opportunity to honor the memory of Police Officer Sonny Kim with the passing of Ohio House Bill 347.

Respectfully,
Police Specialist Robert Blankenship
Cincinnati Police Department
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