**Testimony of Pastor John T. Coats, II**

**Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance**

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Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Chairman Senator Bill Coley

Matt Huffman is the Vice Chair

Ranking Member Senator Hearcel Craig

Distinguished Member of the Committee my name is John Coats, I am the pastor of The Metropolitan Church of God In Christ and I serve as President of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Columbus and Vicinity (IMA Columbus).

Thank you for this time you have allowed for me to speak with you.

The IMA Columbus is Central Ohio’s oldest and longest continuously serving ministerial alliance.

The Membership of the IMA Columbus is comprised of male and female clergy represent various Christian denominations and independent churches.

Today I stand before you to express our support for Governor DeWine’s STRONG Ohio proposal to the General Assembly.

Pastors and Clergy are embedded within our communities in very unique ways, we help in the celebrating of a new birth, we solemnize marriages, we visit the sick and we eulogize the dead.

Many of our churches and ministries function as community centers where our members and the community are served. Pastors and Clergy witness firsthand the impact guns, drugs and alcohol and mental illness has on our community and even within our congregations.

Pastors and Clergy are called into duty when violence erupts and injures or takes the life of a congregant or a congregants’ family member. We are called into service when someone needs just a little convincing to take their medication or if a family member is frightened of a son, daughter and grandchild who is acting out violently.

We serve on the front lines in our communities and we have seen the impact of every epidemic of drug use that has hit our community from Marijuana, Crack and an array of Opioids.

Unfortunately Churches are also are impacted by violent attacks within our walls. Some acts of violence on the church are hate based or an act of violence could be perpetrated by someone who is not mentally well.

Over the last few decades clergy have become more sensitive to varying clinical aid that we can refer people to so they can get the additional needed help they might need as we continue to pray for them and uplift their families. We are fully aware that government cannot legislate righteousness, mental or physical wellness, however there is much government can accomplish in the creation of policies that make sense in creating a safer Ohio.

Governor DeWine’s STRONG Ohio plan lays out a detailed agenda that proposes:

Much needed Safety Protection Orders that work,

Thorough Background Checks, even for private purchases and gun shows.

Rigorous Due Process designed to protect the accused,

Ongoing help to those in crisis, in order to help bring greater healing for those who need help,

New State Background Checks that will protect private sellers from the actions of those who they want to sell to.

The Governor’s proposal outlines Greater Penalties for Gun Crimes which may serve as a deterrent for those who are already barred from owning a gun and for those who would do the dastardly deed of buying a firearm form a person who is already barred from possessing one.

The IMA of Columbus supports Governor DeWine’s proposals; We commend The Governor and his Administration for acting rapidly with a thought out proposal that now rest in your hands. Our thoughts and prayers are with you as the legislature wrestles with the fine details. It is our hope that this committee will continue to move swiftly in your review and edits.

Any assistance we can be to you, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity and thank you to every member of this committee for your willingness to serve Ohioans.

If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to reach out anytime.