Good afternoon,

I am Chief Robin Lees of the Youngstown Police Department. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I have served with YPD for 40 years. I am no stranger to gun violence. I have personally been involved in six duty related shootings in the course of my career. I saw two of my fellow officers wounded during the incidents. I have also experienced the loss of two YPD officers murdered by gun violence.

I can tell you that I support this bill because it provides for a number of common sense remedies to the challenges that we face every day from gun violence.

It address the issues of

-mental health

-substance abuse

-background checks

-the sharing of data base information to make the background checks more effective

-allows private sellers the ability question background of unknown purchasers

-Finally, and most important to me, this bill enhances penalties for selling or illegally possessing firearms.

As I said I am from Youngstown. We have a real problem with conventional gun violence. In 2018 Youngstown had 27 murders. Ten of these murders occurred in two months, October and November. This is not the time of year most jurisdictions see an increase in violent crime. Youngstown’s population is a little more than 65,000. Twenty-six murders is substantial. Faced with this surge in gun violence we responded by stepping up enforcement and enhancing our prevention programs. Our enforcement effort was a collaboration with our state and federal partners. The strategy of the program was to target the purveyors of violence and focus on locations known for gun violence. Part of the effort was to identify those individuals that could qualify for federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney to get meaningful sentencing for felons in possession of firearms.

I hold a newspaper article from earlier this years that reports two men who were prohibited from possessing firearms (under disability) were granted probation- probation; one of the men possessed multiple guns. This is intolerable.

Seriously, why are we forced to run to the federal government or burden the U.S. Attorney? The current penalties under Ohio Law are not doing the job. A common statement made by gun toting criminals in Youngstown is, “I would rather be caught with it (gun) than without it”. This mentality obviously fed by the likelihood of probation even if you are legally prohibited.

Ohio needs more meaningful legislation when it comes to gun crimes. I support this bill because it contains those measures.

Thank you