

December 1, 2020

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Ohio Senate Local Government, Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to House Bill 421.

My name is Mike Posey, and I am the UC Health Public Safety Division Director. The UC Health Public Safety Department is a commissioned hospital police agency, and was first commissioned in November 1992. Today the department provides services at UC Medical Center (UCMC), the region's only adult Level 1 trauma center, the UC Health Business Center, Daniel Drake Center, West Chester Hospital, and the Linder Center of Hope along with a number of smaller facilities across our region.

The department is staffed with both commissioned police and security officers. The police officers are commissioned by the Governor of Ohio through the office of the Secretary of State. All police officers are required to have the same basic police academy training as other police officers in Ohio. The Ohio Peace Officers Training Council (OPOTA) requires the completion of a minimum 750 hours training course at a police academy certified by OPOTA as an approved training facility. Currently we have about 150 officers across our system. When we are fully staffed, about 70 of these will be police officer positions.

Unfortunately, hospitals are not immune to the same challenges faced by our cities of providing a safe environment. On December 20, 2017, an active shooter entered the UCMC Psychiatric Emergency Services Department with two handguns and severely injured a security officer and himself. Shortly after this horrific incident, the UC Health Board of Trustees required a complete evaluation of public safety across our medical campuses. Upon conclusion of this evaluation, it was determined that our patients, employees, and community would be best served if UC Health had its own police force that could carry firearms and work in conjunction with surrounding municipalities and jurisdictions.

Ohio law requires local jurisdictions have mutual aid agreements with the hospital police agencies that operate within the local government's jurisdiction. Such agreements exist between UC Health (UC Health's West Chester location) and West Chester Township and the City of Mason, Ohio. Until recently, we had such an agreement with the City of Cincinnati and UC Health (UCMC and Daniel Drake locations). The City of Cincinnati has chosen to withdraw from the agreement citing concerns over possible liability should the municipality agree to allow our officers to exercise police powers.

To help address this concern, House Bill 421 would grant immunity to local governments, police chiefs and sheriffs who enter into agreements to allow hospital police departments located within their jurisdictions to exercise police powers. The authority to act as hospital police officers is

important and necessary to ensure a consistently safe and secure environment for our patients, visitors, employees and staff.

I understand the concerns of other police chiefs and sheriffs when establishing these agreements, and the responsibility of accepting additional liability for officers whom they do not train nor manage. The intent of these agreements is to make sure the local authorities, communities, and the hospital police agencies have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities each will have in providing a professional and high level of police service. The passage of this bill is another step towards clarifying and building stronger relationships.

House Bill 421 is a vital piece of legislation that will aide both hospitals and local police departments serve the public and to keep patients, staff and visitors safe. The Ohio House passed HB 421 with a vote of 94-0, and we respectfully request this committee favorably report this bill.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Mike Posey
UC Health
Division Director: Safety and Security, Department of Public Safety