



Youngstown Police Ranking Officers Organization

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OPPONENT TESTIMONY ON H.B. 62

By
Michael Cox, President
Youngstown Police Ranking Officers Organization

Chairman McColley, Vice-Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, my name is Michael Cox and I am currently the President of the Youngstown Police Ranking Officers Organization (YPRO), which represents the ranking officers of the Youngstown Police Department. I became a police officer in September of 1996 and spent two years working as a reserve and part time with the Struthers and Poland Village Police Departments. I was hired full time by the Youngstown Police Department in January of 1999 and spent my first 18 years as a patrolman. During 12 of those 18 years I was assigned to the patrol division where I worked all three patrol turns; morning, afternoon, and midnight. For the other six years I was assigned to the FBI Violent Crimes Task Force where I was responsible for, or assisted in, the investigation and apprehension of hundreds of fugitives and others who were wanted for a variety of violent crimes, including murder, felonious assault, robberies, burglaries and rapes.

In November of 2016 I was promoted to the rank of Detective/Sergeant. Since then, I have been assigned to the Detective Bureau where I investigate person and property crimes which include murder, felonious assault, robbery, and burglary. Additionally, I was a member of the Mahoning Valley Crisis Response Team (SWAT) for 17 years and recently retired from the team in the fall of 2018.

I am writing you to express my support for the front license plate requirement for motor vehicles in the State of Ohio. During my career as a police officer, I have witnessed firsthand how important a front license plate can be for not only solving crime, but preventing crime. There are thousands of incidents every year around the State of Ohio and United States where the presence of a front license plate on a vehicle helps locate an abducted child, a person who committed a home invasion, a drug dealer driving dangerous drugs and weapons around our homes, schools, and children, or something as simple as catching a person who committed an hit skip auto accident.

I would like to share the story of a crime I recently investigated where the lack of a front license plate almost allowed a person to get away with stealing over \$12,000 from a downtown Youngstown business and in fact did prevent the recovery of the money stolen. On January 4, 2019, a downtown Youngstown business office was forcefully entered which resulted in approximately \$12,000 and three credit cards being taken. A video surveillance system inside the office caught the suspect prying open a metal cabinet where the cash and credit cards were located. I was assigned the case and quickly found

video from four different downtown businesses/locations which showed the suspect driving his vehicle to and from a parking spot on a main downtown street. One of the locations was a restaurant located directly in front of where the suspect parked his vehicle. The security video had a close angle and provided clear footage of the front of the suspect's vehicle, but this vehicle did not have a front license plate. I later discovered video of the rear of the vehicle but could not clearly identify the tag numbers due to the distance from the camera to the automobile. A week of additional work was required until the suspect was identified and arrested in Cleveland. Unfortunately for the small business owner victim the money was gone.

In cases like this and hundreds of others around the state a front license plate allows law enforcement an additional tool to identify and apprehend criminals. Video technology is expanding into store fronts, ring doorbells, dash board cameras and more. Now is not the time for the State of Ohio to remove a license plate that can be identified by these new cameras just to satisfy the vanity of a particular car owner.

A front license plate is of great assistance to law enforcement. I respectfully urge this committee to strike language removing this important tool.