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**House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
Senate Bill 59 — Sponsor Testimony
Wednesday May 14, 2021**

Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Loychik, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 59.

In my district we have a truly historic war relic. In fact, it is a crown jewel of Lancaster—an authentic Civil War cannon used by Ohio native General William Tecumseh Sherman during the Battle of Shiloh and his famed March to the Sea through the South.

Like the Sherman cannon, Ohio is blessed to have numerous pieces of history on display throughout our great state. Stretching back to the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the wars of the 20th Century to our wars in the Middle East, these pieces of history remind us of the sacrifices brave men and women made in the name of freedom and liberty. They let us pause so we can remember how high the cost truly is to preserve the rights and privileges we enjoy as Americans.

These relics carry another high price as well—the amounts that unscrupulous private dealers and collectors will pay to hide these historical pieces away from

public view forever. Other local governments sometimes think they can sell these cannons for scrap to be melted down. It is far from uncommon for collectors to approach cash-strapped local governments or cemeteries and offer them what seems like a sizable amount of money for their historic cannons. For some of these organizations, it can be an offer too good to pass up. They can erase a deficit by liquidating one of their assets, which may appear on the surface to be a reasonable financial strategy to pursue.

However, there are flaws to that decision to sell a piece of American history.

First of all, cannons, artillery and their equipment are still property of the federal government, making the transaction an illegal sale.

Second, these war relics have a value to society that no private collector can match, a reminder to future generations of what it has taken to preserve our freedoms. Allowing that reminder to be forever lost to a private collection or melted down as scrap is a detriment to the public as a whole and a stain on the memory of those who served and sacrificed.

Senate Bill 59 will provide the necessary protections these war relics deserve. Here is what we propose in the bill:

- It would prohibit a war relic located on public property or on the property of a public cemetery from being sold, destroyed, relocated, removed, altered or otherwise disturbed by any person. Should someone try to buy and remove these relics, they would be given a 90 day right to cure period, followed by a fine if not cured within that timeframe.

- Exceptions include:
 - If the war relic is returned to the federal government.
 - If repair work is being done.
 - If it is being placed on a temporary display
 - If it is being used for re-enactment purposes.

- The bill does provide exemptions for the state and political subdivisions, but only if they can clearly prove their ownership of the war relic in writing.

- The legislation also targets purchasers of these war relics by levying a \$10,000 fine against them. This is a significant financial disincentive, but it also serves to target their reputation as well. No reasonable collector will engage in this activity with the threat of this fine being attached to their name.
 - No local government suffers any fine or penalty under this bill.

It should also be added that an amendment was adopted while in committee in the Senate to permit the permanent relocation of cannons and artillery to public property owned by the same custodial government. This was done in order to ensure that though governments could not be fined for doing so, that they would not be in violation of the Revised Code.

In closing, it is time that the state adopt legislation to protect these invaluable pieces of history from disappearing from public view forever—or worse, being melted down for scrap. We owe it to the memories of the men and women who served to establish and then preserve our freedoms.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to preserve the artifacts they will one day experience for themselves.

This legislation was supported by Ohio History Connection, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Sons of Veterans Reserve, the Society of the War of 1812, and Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

Thank you Chairman Ghanbari and members of the committee for the opportunity to bring this bill before you today. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.