



PREBLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Michael L. Simpson, Sheriff
1139 Preble Drive
Eaton, Ohio 45320
Bus. (937) 456-6301
Non-Emerg. (937) 456-6262
Fax (937) 456-2524
Jail (937) 456-6323
Jail Fax (937) 456-6353

House Criminal Justice Committee

House Bill 22 – Proponent Written Testimony

March 8, 2021

Sheriff Michael L. Simpson
Preble County

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Michael Simpson, Sheriff of Preble County. I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association, where I serve as the Chairman of the Legislative Committee. Having served in Law Enforcement for the past 34 years and as Sheriff for the last 17 years, I want to take a moment to speak to you regarding House Bill 22.

The BSSA supports House Bill 22 to expand the offense of Obstructing of Justice to include failure to follow a lawful order or diverting a law enforcement officer's attention. Civil unrest last summer across the nation, on many occasions, led to violence and property damage.

While many people were exercising their First Amendment right, others used this as an avenue to promote violence, much of which was directed at law enforcement officers who were there to maintain order and protect those who were exercising their rights peacefully.

House Bill 22 strengthens current law by adding additional conduct to existing language that would prohibit someone from purposely diverting a law enforcement officer's attention away from performing their duty. This includes throwing an object or substance at the officer, interfering with an officer's ability to control a detainee, or by simply placing an object or substance around the officer that would prevent the officer from either reaching someone outside the area or the officer being able to be reached from outside the area.

Law enforcement has witnessed that diversionary tactics applied by those whose sole intent is to distract, disrupt and impede law enforcement's ability to maintain order in these situations is a direct result of a simple failure of some; the requirement to follow a lawful order of a police officer. This has led, and will continue to lead, to unnecessary injuries to police officers. These actions endanger the public as well.

Sheriffs across Ohio support the Constitution and a person's right to exercise their First Amendment right to free speech. The Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association supports this legislation and the penalties included in the bill. The bill will provide additional tools to law enforcement as we work to protect our communities and to protect those who choose to peacefully exercise the 1st Amendment right.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing the Sheriffs of Ohio to submit our written testimony on this important issue.