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Good morning Chairman Cross and Ranking Member Howse.

My name is Mike Rodgers and I am the Director of Policy and Legislation for Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 110 and on the Attorney General Office's (AGO) budget for FY22-FY23.

We believe the as introduced version of the budget will allow us to continue our mission of effectively and efficiently protecting Ohioans and upholding the rule of law. I'd like to spend a few brief minutes talking about how this budget allows us to meet these goals.

The current budget request for the AGO is \$383,333,020 in FY22 and \$386,199,201 in FY23. These numbers represent a decrease of 2.9% from our estimated budget ending in FY21 and an increase of 0.7% for FY23. While these numbers represent a small decrease and modest increase in FY 22 and 23 respectively, we would ask that the legislature retain the funding amounts contained in the "As Introduced" version of HB 110.

From a staffing perspective, the AGO's current staffing is comprised of approximately 1490 FTEs and 28 part-time employees. If our current level of funding in HB 110 is to be further reduced, the most likely result would be the elimination of FTEs in FY 22.

Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation

Over the last several biennium's, the Attorney General's Office launched some of the most important law enforcement initiatives of modern times through the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, commonly known as BCI. This includes updates to the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG), a new digitized background check system (OBIS), an Ohio sexual assault tracking kit system, and cutting-edge advancements in testing capabilities related to THC quantification, DNA analysis, and identification techniques.

BCI is a valued partner and resource for local law enforcement agencies, providing fast and accurate services, many times at no charge. This includes lab testing and analysis, crime scene assistance, and providing an independent third-party review for officer involved critical incidents. Despite growing demand for BCI's services and the significant expenses related to new technology, training, and equipment, BCI continues to do more with less.

But there are limits to what BCI can do without additional resources. As part of our office's larger budgeting process, the AGO plans to continue to seek an update to our criminal background check fees which have remained stagnant for well over a decade. The AGO will seek an \$8 fee increase for our initial background check costs (going from \$22 to \$30) and a \$1 adjustment to our rapback fee (going from \$5 to \$6 annually). With these needed and modest increases, BCI will be able to continue to maintain the high level of service Ohioans have come to expect and trust. Without these fee increases, the AGO will either be forced to seek additional revenue from the General Assembly, or to reduce the scope of the services it currently offers to local enforcement agencies.

COVID-19 Response

As people all over the world were forced to adjust their lives in the face of a global pandemic, our operations and employees were also affected. Once the extent of our new reality became better understood, we transitioned from reacting to the pandemic, to daring to embrace our shared adversity in order to learn from it. This led us to challenging our notions for who could work from home, thinking creatively about how to leverage technology, and thinking critically about our core office functions.

The results were incredible. In relatively short order, the AGO shifted to a largely work from home footing while successfully maintaining our existing operations without a degradation in services. This required many hours of planning, IT infrastructure and equipment obstacles that had to be overcome, thoughtful working arrangements and sanitization plans, and countless other details many in the legislature would also recognize. As a result of our experiences over the last 11 months, we have determined that 25% of our staff will continue to permanently work from home. They've proven they can do it, and over time, this will allow us to significantly reduce our requirements for office space in downtown Columbus, Cincinnati, and Toledo, as well as many of the other overhead costs associated with that space.

Additionally, building upon the AG's background as a champion of performance auditing from his days as the Auditor of State, the AGO has optimized its fleet of vehicles according to maintenance efficiency and brought more IT related contracts back in-house generating significant savings to the taxpayers.

Language Requests

In addition to maintaining the current funding levels for FY22-FY23, the AGO also respectfully requests the Ohio House to make the following technical changes which would improve our Collections practices, eliminate a duplicative database, and transfer existing AGO audit authority to the Auditor of State's office.

The AGO serves as the primary collection agent for the State of Ohio collecting outstanding debts owed to the state as well as its subdivisions. Owed debt to the state can take the form of unpaid taxes, overdue medical bills from a university operated hospital, or monetary findings for recovery issued against government officials for fraud, waste, and abuse. The Collections Enforcement Section carries out the mission of collecting on state owed debt, or appoints special counsel to collect state debt on their behalf. In FY 20 alone, Collections recovered \$450 million. This is a needed resource that serves both a benefit to the state as well as taxpayers. For this purpose, we request the following amendments to HB 110:

- Allowing municipalities to opt in to the Treasury Offset Program for municipal debt.
- Grant rulemaking authority over the special counsel division within the Collections Enforcement Section.
- Grant rulemaking authority to allow the promulgation of rules to establish a different length of time in order to diminish the statute of limitations on state debts.

Additionally, the AGO is seeking to clarify the AGO's role in foreclosure sales and maintaining of records related to those sales. Existing office functions will enable us to make the reports publicly available without the need for an online database at a cost to taxpayers. This language also would leave the door open to build this database in the future should a need arise. Overall, the language will simplify the AGO's involvement in foreclosure sales and lessen the confusion in current law.

Finally, under current law the AGO audits DSA economic grant recipients for compliance. In an effort to promote government efficiency, this amendment would transition this responsibility over to the Auditor of State's (AOS) office who already has expertise in these types of audits. The Auditor of State's Office supports this amendment.

Conclusion

Chairman Cross and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to testify on behalf of the AGO. I would be happy to take any questions at this time.