

53rd House District

Butler County

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center

77 S. High Street

13th Floor

Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111

(614) 644-5094

Rep53@ohiohouse.gov



Committees

Higher Education and Career
Readiness

Technology and Innovation
Vice Chair

Transportation and Public Safety

Ways and Means

Thomas Hall
State Representative

January 18, 2022

Rep. Hall HB 501 Sponsor Testimony

Chair Merrin, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 501, the township omnibus bill. This bill is put forth each General Assembly with changes and recommendations backed by the Ohio Township Association and its 1,308 member townships.

This bill comes after many conversations and collaborations with the OTA, its board of directors, and townships. As a former two-term Madison Township Trustee, I believe that there is no better government than local government. Many of you know that townships only have powers outlined in the Ohio Revised Code, and any updates to their authority or manner of operation must be made legislatively.

The six changes included HB 501 to our Revised Code may seem small or miniscule, but in reality, these changes can have great impacts on our local governments. I'll briefly outline each of the current changes contained in the bill:

Township Donation Process

Under current law, townships are able to donate property valued \$2,500 or less, but with several processes and procedures that can make the donation process cumbersome. For example, the board of trustees must adopt a resolution setting guidelines for a donation program and must post notice. Nonprofit organizations interested in receiving donated property must submit written notice to the board, and the board maintains a list of all eligible organizations that have expressed interest in receiving donated property as well as a list of all unneeded property that the board intends to donate, which must be posted continuously in the board of trustees' office and on its website.

Rather than this mandated process, HB 501 allows townships to set their own donation policies or simply to donate to eligible nonprofits as needed. The bill retains the requirement that property is donated to a 501(a) or 501(c)(3) located within the state.

Declared Emergencies

The bill expands a township's authority during a declared emergency. Under current law, a township may adopt a resolution declaring an emergency, which provides the township trustees up to six months of special authority, currently related only to snow removal or acquiring emergency equipment without bidding. The bill expands the board's authority during the emergency period by allowing the board to conduct township meetings virtually and/or adopt a resolution establishing a curfew during the emergency period.

Preservation Commission

House Bill 501 allows a township to establish a Township Preservation Commission, tasked with preserving historic properties in the unincorporated territory of the township. Municipalities can currently establish preservation commissions under their home rule authority. In addition to encouraging the preservation of historic properties, the commission may also allow access to additional grants supporting this mission.

Whistleblower Clarification

Ohio has two whistleblower statutes that apply to townships: R.C. §§124.341, which applies to civil services townships only, and 4113.52. Under R.C. §117.103, the Auditor of State is required to establish and maintain a system for fraud reporting. R.C. §124.341 specifically mentions R.C. §117.103 but R.C. §4113.52 does not. HB 501 clarifies that protections provided by the Auditor of State's office apply to all employees, not only civil service.

TIF Access

Under current law, there are different types of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) tools available. Generally, the goal of a TIF is to fund public infrastructure improvements. Under R.C. §5709.41, municipalities engaged in redevelopment may use TIF proceeds for public improvements and private property improvements. HB 501 allows townships to use this specific type of TIF as well. The change came as a request from the Coalition of Large Ohio Urban Townships, whose members tend to be located in more densely populated areas.

School Resource Officer Levy

Current law allows a school to pass a levy for many purposes, including for school safety and security. However, there is no levy option for school or other political subdivision specifically to provide a school resource officer. HB 501 would allow for this option by enabling a school district, township, or municipality to place a levy on the ballot specifically to fund a school resource officer. The levy would need to be supported by the voters and would be limited to five years without renewal or replacement. With school safety initiatives increasingly more important, this would be another local option for school safety without any state funding.

In the coming weeks and committee hearings, the OTA will be in to testify on this bill and the impacts these changes will have on townships across Ohio. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on this important piece of legislation, and I will be happy to take any questions at this time.