

Eli Wanner

Testimony on House Bill 519

15 February 2022

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 519. This legislation puts into place much-needed protections for taxpayers against excessive late penalties and notices.

My name is Eli Wanner. I am currently the pastor of two small churches in Athens County, and prior to that I was a student at Ohio University. In August 2021, I received a notice from the Regional Income Tax Agency, or RITA, that they had not received my Grove City municipal tax return for 2019. I immediately went online and paid the taxes owed in the amount of \$46.22. When I logged on, I saw that my 2020 municipal tax return was also late, although I had not been notified of that. I immediately paid those taxes as well, in the amount of \$22.17.

In 2019 and 2020, I was a college student working multiple jobs outside of Grove City. Being an inexperienced and young taxpayer, I had wrongly assumed that the software I had used to file my state and federal tax returns had automatically submitted my municipal returns as well. I did not know that my municipal tax returns were not included and would have to be filed separately. I did not fully understand that I owed taxes to Grove City despite not working there. And I also did not know that my Grove City tax return should be filed through RITA – an entity that I was unaware of until they mailed me notice of my late filing. May I also point out that this notice did not come until 2021 – two years after 2019, the year in question.

In September, I received a billing statement from RITA alerting me that I owed a total of \$238.37 in late filing penalties and interest for tax years 2019 and 2020. I contacted RITA about this, and in an unusual but welcome circumstance they agreed to give me a time waiver while I contacted the Grove City Tax Administrator and requested an abatement of these penalties. Because this was my first time failing to file city tax returns, and because of my inexperience and lack of knowledge, the City of Grove City fortunately granted an abatement of the penalties imposed for 2019 and 2020.

The opaque nature of municipal taxes is confusing to students and young adults such as myself, and anyone who is not an expert in tax law. Even worse, the inordinate penalties imposed on late tax returns, which often amount (as in my case) to significantly more than the actual tax owed, threatens to be financially harmful to lower-income families and individuals. House Bill 519 provides fair penalties for late municipal tax returns while not disproportionately punishing well-meaning, tax-paying citizens like myself for their confusion or lack of knowledge. I sincerely hope for its passage. Chairman Merrin and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 519.