

Committee Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki and members of the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Barry Tiffany and I have the distinct honor of serving as the Township Administrator for Sugarcreek Township, in Greene County. In addition, I have the pleasure to serve as the Vice Chair for the Executive Committee of the Coalition of Large Ohio Urban Townships, CLOUT. I am providing this testimony in both capacities and as a father of two, a step-father of a 14 year old daughter, and most recently a grandfather of a beautiful three month old granddaughter.

I am writing in support of House Bill 501, and in particular the provision for a local property tax solely for the provision of School Resource Officers.

I began this quest approximately four years ago as a local business owner/friend and I were talking the day after yet another school shooting here in the United States. He was asking what it would take to make sure his daughter was safe at the Middle School she attended. As we discussed the issue I shared that all data showed that having a school resource officer present in the schools appeared to be the best deterrent. He asked me how much it would cost to hire an officer to be there every day and said he would write the check to cover the cost. Although the generosity of his offer was tough to turn down, he would not be willing to fund it the next or following years and therefore it was not a viable option. But it did identify a need.

In our community we employ an officer who is assigned to the High School each day and he splits some of his day at the Middle School. The school district helps to cover some of the cost of the officer's hours, but neither the Township nor the School District have the funds to cover the cost of an additional officer to have an officer at each location all day. Typically school shooters are methodical in their plan of attack and would be aware of when the officer usually would be out of one school and at the other, so being able to have an officer at each school, uninterrupted, would be ideal.

Currently the Ohio Revised Code does provide for the opportunity for schools to seek approval of a levy that could fund School Resource Officers, but the levy language permits those funds to be utilized for many other purposes also. An issue that creates trust issues for many voters.

The request before you would allow communities in Ohio to determine if they want to have more School Resource Officers paid for with dedicated funds, solely for that purpose. If a community wants an officer in each school, or two in a large high school, it would be a local decision, independent of State of Ohio funding or Federal funds. A local decision of local dollars with a minimal impact on local taxes for most communities. A local decision that would help to make our schools safer for the children in Ohio.

If you question whether School Resource Officers are effective, I would suggest you look no further than a student who attended our local high school. The student had several interactions with our Resource Officer during his time in school and graduated without carrying out an incident in the school injuring anyone. His name was Connor Betts and in August of 2019, at the age of 24, he shot and killed nine people including his sister, and injured 17 more in the Oregon District of Dayton before being killed by officers. The FBI's final report stated that Betts had fantasized about mass-shootings, serial killings, and murder-suicide for several years. Absent the presence and intervention of our School Resource Officer, those killing may have happened while he was in school.

I ask for your support of this bill and in particular this important portion of the bill that will allow Ohioans to determine the level of protection they want in their local schools for their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Barry Tiffany
Township Administrator
Sugar Creek Township