

Ohio Senate Transportation Committee
PROPONENT TESTIMONY – SB 79
Edward Tomba, Chief of Police, Middleburg Heights, Ohio
May 5, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee as a proponent of Senate Bill 79.

I am Edward Tomba and I currently serve as the Chief of Police for the City of Middleburg Heights. I have been in law enforcement for 34 years and served as a Cleveland police officer for 32 years with my last assignment being the Deputy Chief of Homeland Security and Special Operations.

We in law enforcement need many tools to accomplish our mission of public safety. One of those tools is the ability to keep roadways clear of abandoned vehicles or vehicles that have been involved in an accident. The relationship we have with Ohio towing and recovery companies that provide these services is an essential part of our mission of public safety. The towing industry is a true partner for us and can be counted on seven days a week, 24 hours a day, in all types of climates and situations.

The City of Middleburg Heights is 8 square miles and we have a stretch of Interstate 71 running through our city. That interstate is a major thoroughfare for the southern suburbs and the City of Cleveland. A traffic accident or abandoned vehicle can affect thousands of commuters. The timely response of the towing companies is essential to keep motorists safe and interstate traffic moving.

We are a Department with 30 employees and our dispatchers process the paperwork for those vehicles that have been towed and ultimately abandoned. They have other duties that at times have been neglected due to this added responsibility. This bill will not hinder the authority of the law enforcement agencies. The chief of the municipality has the final authority as to whether the vehicle is needed for a criminal case or making the decision to use the unclaimed vehicles for police purposes. Having the towing companies process the paperwork and add additional notifications if necessary to vehicle owners will relieve the staff at the police departments from this duty and they will be able to concentrate on other duties. The towing companies will remain accountable to law enforcement to utilize this process properly.

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I believe the passage of this bill is in line with the law enforcement mission of providing services to the public. It will allow for a better system of notification and it will allow for improved processing of unclaimed vehicles from impound storage. Towing companies provide a service and they should not be penalized for assisting law enforcement to fulfill a part of our mission and assisting us in keeping the roadways clear of abandoned vehicles or vehicles involved in traffic accidents.

SB 79 is a good common sense solution that will create a smooth process to allow towing and storage companies the ability to dispose of abandoned vehicles properly if the law enforcement entity chooses not to take possession or process the vehicle for disposal. Thank you for your attention to this matter and I would be happy to answer any question from the committee at this time.