
**Written Testimony in Support of S.B. 237
Submitted to House Civil Justice Committee by
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Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Ohio Association of Broadcasters (OAB) in support of S.B. 237, the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act.

The OAB is the trade association of over-the-air television and radio stations licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to serve communities throughout the state of Ohio. Our member stations take their obligation to serve very seriously and invest significant resources covering news and events, weather and sports, and reporting on breaking news and other emergency information. Broadcast journalists – like all journalists – are often the targets of frivolous lawsuits brought by individuals or entities whose motivation frequently is to intimidate and chill certain speech with which they take issue, including legitimate investigative journalism. Defending against these meritless lawsuits, which are known as “Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation” (or SLAPP lawsuits), requires a substantial investment of time and money. Even for a defendant news media entity or individual who ultimately prevails in litigation, the expenses can be devastating.

We therefore appreciate the leadership of Senator Gavarone and Chair Manning in sponsoring S.B. 237, which would protect the news media and individual citizens against these SLAPP lawsuits, by creating an expedited judicial review process that would allow judges to dismiss frivolous SLAPP suits that meet specific criteria and to order the plaintiff in such instances to pay the defendant’s court costs and legal expenses. S.B. 237 is appropriately narrow, applying only to defined “protected communication,” and the legislation does not insulate defendants from legitimate libel or slander cases.

Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar anti-SLAPP legislation. We hope the House Civil Justice Committee and the Ohio House of Representatives will give favorable consideration to this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.