



OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

State Representative Andrea White

HB 56 – Sponsor Testimony
House Criminal Justice Committee
3-14-2023

Less than two months ago, in the early hours of a cold January morning, hundreds of people gathered at the corner of a major intersection in downtown Dayton summonsed by social media. Dozens of cars were strategically parked to block the streets to create a stage of sorts. And then what police have called a “pop-up street takeover” began – as reckless drivers in high-performance cars screeched and careened dangerously close to the watching crowd doing doughnuts and burnouts with people carelessly hanging out windows, doors and even the hood of a car. Pulled off other emergent calls, law enforcement began arriving and eventually the “hooning” drivers fled from the scene – later gathering at two other prearranged spots to take over streets in two other jurisdictions before dawn broke. Fortunately, no one was hurt that night. Amazingly, not even the people standing in the middle of the speeding circles of cars filming and posting the event online. That’s not always the case.

In case you’re unfamiliar with the practice which has terrorized neighborhoods and streets throughout Ohio and the U.S., the word “hooning” appears to trace to Australian terms referring to reckless drivers and driving the creates hazards on our streets. As defined by House Bill 56, “Hooning” means operation a motor vehicle in a reckless or dangerous manner to provoke a reaction from spectators by speeding; street racing; performing donuts, burnouts, drifting, rapid acceleration, squealing tires, or engine revving; or allowing passengers to ride partially or fully outside of the motor vehicle.

The bill attempts to crack down on this practice by creating new offenses for those who participate in hooning, particularly as an operator or passenger of the motor vehicle with a first degree misdemeanor, potential license suspension and potential seizure and forfeiture under Ohio’s current Forfeiture law. Additionally, spectators there deliberately to watch or assist in the logistics of the hooning event could be charged with an unclassified misdemeanor with a potential fine. It should be noted, a person who is at the wrong place at the wrong time is not considered a spectator for purposes of the bill’s prohibitions or penalties. ., along

with increasing the penalties for the offenses of willfully eluding or fleeing a police officer using a motor vehicle from a first degree misdemeanor to a fourth degree felony. It also increases the penalty from a fourth degree felony to a third degree felony if the flight is immediately after the commission of a felony.

I want to emphasize that we are bringing this bill to you at the request of local law enforcement officials and elected city leaders who are asking us for more tools to combat this social media/internet fueled craze of reckless driving and street takeover that has already injured lives, terrorized citizens, resulted in significant property damage, and wasted precious law enforcement time and dollars that could be spent protecting and responding to other crises throughout our cities and townships. Multiple jurisdictions are dealing with this issue – at times with the same crew in the same night speeding from city to city and crossing county or state lines. Aviation resources and dollars from the Ohio State Patrol have been activated to assist. And cities are spending money not only on staff overtime, but on installing all sorts of speed deterrent devices in an attempt to make roadways more safe and unattractive to the practice of drag racing and reckless driving. On one particularly long stretch of straight road in Dayton, the city has invested over \$400,000 in safety upgrades such as cement barricades, speed cushions, speed tables or piano key-type markings and countdown signals at intersections to try to deter the drag racing, donuts and 360's that were threatening drivers on multiple occasions last summer.

This problem is not unique to our region. Multiple jurisdictions have been impacted over the past few years. We need to support our local communities looking for a statewide solution to this problem. One that doesn't offer a patchwork of local ordinances that can be used by cities and townships alike. Our roadways are made for transit to school, to work, to the store, to bring people to opportunities, not for this type of activity that risks injury to lives and property – not only to those involved but to innocent people who may be caught in harm's way by fleeing vehicles.

We urge you to support House Bill 56 and to give our communities the tools they are asking for to keep our residents safe and our roadways secure.