



HB 56 – Dayton Police Department Chief Kamran Afzal Proponent Testimony
House Criminal Justice Committee
3-28-2023

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and the entire Criminal Justice Committee, I appreciate you allowing me the time to offer testimony in support of HB 56. Due to a significant increase in illegal street racing and street takeover or “hooning” events since 2020, the City of Dayton and Dayton Police Department have taken reactive and proactive measures to address these issues.

The activity in early 2020 mainly concerned street racing. We had numerous instances where participants would transport the involved vehicles in a trailer, specifically for lining up their cars and racing them on public streets or parking lots of closed businesses. After taking some strict enforcement action where we towed vehicles, made arrests for illegal street racing, and implemented some environmental factors such as installing speed bumps, for the most part, the street racing activity subsided.

Nearly simultaneously, we began receiving reports of hooning activity throughout our community, often organized via social media. One of the frequently utilized locations was on Gettysburg Avenue, an area immediately adjacent to Harrison Township, which is patrolled by the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office and the Trotwood Police Department. During these events, vehicle occupants and spectators often would be in the area, hanging from the car, riding in the trunk, under the open hood, or standing in the middle of the intersection, filming or participating in this activity. This is concerning since we are dealing with multiple high-performance vehicles, and all it would take is for someone to fall out of a car, be struck by a vehicle, and be severely injured and or killed.

Due to this activity, we organized joint enforcement operations to address these issues by working with Ohio State Highway Patrol, specifically their aviation assets, the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office, and Trotwood Police Department. Generally, when officers arrive on the scene of these events, some vehicles would flee at a high rate of speed and go to other locations to continue this dangerous activity. The aviation units would help direct officers to the next place so potential enforcement action could be taken.

During these operations, we have noticed that some vehicles will remove or obscure their license plates to prevent potential identification of vehicle registration information. There are also instances where the driver and occupants will cover their faces to prevent identification.

Although we are experiencing fewer planned events than before, most events are now planned by utilizing other covert means of communication, such as applications for peer-to-peer communications. These tactics have prevented us from being aware of planned events, which recently occurred when this activity took place several months ago in Downtown Dayton intersections.

An additional and even more prevalent concern are the number of vehicles that flee from officers after attempted traffic stops, and sometimes just at the sight of a law enforcement vehicle. These vehicles will drive 80 MPH or more, proceed through red lights, and drive erratically for some time after an attempted traffic stop. This reckless driving behavior endangers the lives of everyone on the road. The Dayton Police Department has been tracking this data for years, and in 2021 we had 526 documented incidents of a vehicle fleeing from an officer.

Strengthening the failure to comply law by automatically making a person who fails to comply with an officer during a traffic stop from a first-degree misdemeanor to a fourth-degree felony will hopefully prevent individuals from fleeing from officers for lower-level crimes.

The Dayton Police Department has a pursuit policy, allowing for the pursuit of individuals involved in violent crimes. When we pursue a vehicle, we conduct an administrative investigation to ensure officers comply with the department's policy and procedures. The increased penalty for failure to comply will not increase the number of pursuits the department is involved in; we ultimately hope to reduce the number of times individuals decide to flee from a traffic stop.

If House Bill 56 is passed and signed into law, the goal would be to advertise these changes to prevent this activity in Dayton and throughout the State. Without changes in legislation allowing for stricter penalties, we fear this dangerous activity will continue to occur throughout our communities resulting in damages to our public roadways, and private property, severe injuries to involved or uninvolved community members, or potential loss of life. Lastly, this activity strains our limited budgetary and staffing resources, which are needed to address other critical community issues.

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and the Criminal Justice Committee, I appreciate your time today and we hope you will support the passage of House Bill 56. Please let me know if you have any questions for me or Assistant Chief Eric Henderson.