



BRIAN LAMPTON

State Representative | Ohio House District 70

House Criminal Justice Committee – HB 450 Sponsor Testimony

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Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on House Bill 450.

Unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, are an exciting emerging technology. In the Aviation and Aerospace Committee, we have had many discussions about how to properly integrate this technology for the benefit of our state. But as drone usage increases, there also exists a corresponding set of risks, and our state law needs to stay up to date with the technologies of the day. I believe this legislation provides a comprehensive set of protections for Ohioans. This bill can be most easily understood as an expansion of existing trespass law to include certain uses of unmanned aerial vehicles. Put simply, behaviors which are already unlawful for individuals to perform with their person would be extended to include performing that same behavior with a drone.

For property like private dwellings, this bill includes prohibitions such as entering and remaining on the premises of another without permission, spying or eavesdropping, and recording someone where they have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

Over the last several years, we have seen many high-profile incidents, some here in Ohio, where major sporting events have been interrupted by drones. While the FAA already has regulations in place to similar effect, this bill would provide statutory authority to enable state and local law enforcement to take effective action in these cases. These protections for busy public venues, as well as the portions of this bill that prohibit the disturbance of places of critical infrastructure, are a necessary safeguard for Ohioans.

In the process of introducing this legislation, I have heard concerns from individuals in the insurance and surveying industries that this bill may interfere with their business practice. To be clear, the intent of this legislation is to provide protections against negligent or malicious actors. In the case of surveying, I do not believe that this legislation will prevent them from doing their work where they have been contracted and have express permission to operate. Regarding insurance assessments, I do not believe that it is an unreasonable standard to obtain prior permission to fly a drone from the property owner, just as you should if you were going to inspect a property on foot. However, I am completely willing to have ongoing discussions with individuals from these industries or any others about concerns that they may have.

Thank you again to the members of the Criminal Justice Committee for the opportunity to speak today, and for your continued consideration of this important legislation.