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Kevin D. Miller State Representative

Chairman Ghanbari, Ranking Member Thomas, and the members of the House Homeland Security Committee, good morning and thank you for allowing us to provide sponsor testimony on HB 237, which seeks to bring uniformity and clarity to the traffic laws and safety equipment regulations for UTV's, more commonly known as side-by-sides.

Current laws and regulations surrounding the operation of UTV's are very confusing and have led to inconsistencies in enforcement. In fact, some areas in the State will register them for on-road use while others will not. Not to mention the exemptions that are in place for the agriculture community. By implementing a statewide framework, we can streamline the understanding and application of the regulations, ensuring that UTV operators can navigate Ohio's roads safely and with a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

Moreover, uniform regulations will benefit law enforcement officers who are tasked with enforcing traffic laws. They will have a consistent set of rules and safety standards to reference, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness in enforcing UTV-related regulations. This, in turn, will contribute to enhancing overall road safety and reducing potential hazards associated with UTV operation.

The proposed legislation would allow for the registration and operation of UTV's on township and county roads if the following two prongs are met:

- 1) The vehicle passes a safety inspection conducted by a law enforcement agency.
- 2) The Board of Commissioners passes a resolution to allow their use.

If a county opts to adopt a resolution to allow UTV usage, then they are legal to operate on any county or township road with a maximum speed limit 55 MPH and must abide by the safety and traffic regulations outlined in this legislation. If a county does not adopt a resolution permitting UTV usage, they are illegal to operate on township and county roads within that county. It is important to note that municipalities and villages retain home rule authority, allowing them to enact their own regulations within their jurisdiction. This provision recognizes the importance of local decision-making and allows counties to determine whether UTV's are permitted on their roads, aligning with the preferences of each community.

This legislation is also designed to ensure the safety of UTV operators and passengers. It includes mandatory safety equipment such as a roll cage, two red reflectors, a rearview mirror, a windshield or safety glasses, and occupant restraining devices for all occupants. These measures are designed to protect individuals and minimize the risk of accidents and injuries. Additionally, the legislation requires UTV operators to undergo an equipment inspection by law enforcement, provide proof of financial responsibility, and obtain and display a valid registration/plate before operating on roadways. These requirements further contribute to the safety and accountability of UTV usage.

This legislation also recognizes the importance of UTV's within the agriculture community. It is important to note that this legislation retains the right of farmers to travel from field to field across public roads on UTVs and ATVs if they are displaying a triangular slow-moving vehicle emblem; however, for those who chose to use a UTV for both farm and road use, they must register the UTV but will be exempt from the taxes and fees associated with the registration.

Chairman Ghanbari, Ranking Member Thomas, and the members of the House Homeland Security Committee, thank you for allowing us to provide sponsor testimony on HB 237. By supporting this legislation, you would contribute to promoting safer UTV usage on Ohio's roads while simplifying the regulatory landscape for both law enforcement and consumers. We are more than happy to take any questions from the committee.