



Ohio State Highway Patrol
Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Swindell
House Bill 230
House Homeland Security Committee
October 18, 2023

Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the House Homeland Security Committee – I am Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Swindell, assistant superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

Human trafficking persists as an epidemic throughout the country. The Ohio State Highway Patrol is bringing our full weight and resources to bear on this problem. With this thought in mind, it is my honor to appear before you today to provide support for House Bill 230. This bill will provide meaningful tools to assist law enforcement in combatting human & drug trafficking.

State Troopers average one million traffic contacts every year. This places us in a unique position to interdict criminal activity & disrupt criminal organizations that use our roadways to further their objectives. A Trooper's view of trafficking cases usually begins through a traffic stop. Often times, these cases begin with minor traffic violations, where a trooper pulled someone over. I'd like to share a few recent examples of how criminal organizations are using Ohio's roadways:

In March, a trooper stopped a Toyota minivan on the Ohio Turnpike for a cracked windshield violation. The trooper found 11 persons inside the vehicle which was designed to seat seven. Upon questioning the occupants, it was discovered none possessed documents to identify themselves. With the assistance of the U.S. Border Patrol, it was determined all had entered the country unlawfully.

Troopers also discovered a large quantity of cash hidden within the drivers clothing. Further interviews revealed the passengers, or their family members, had paid for them to be driven from Albuquerque, New Mexico to various states along the east coast including Pennsylvania; Maryland; Virginia; Tennessee; North Carolina; and Florida. The driver, who had been previously deported more than 40 times, was turned over to Border Patrol Agents to be charged under Federal Alien Smuggling laws.

In January, a trooper stopped a Texas registered pickup for a speed violation on Interstate 70. After a K-9 alerted to the vehicle, a search revealed several boxes of firearms in the bed of the truck. There were 4 AK-47's, 4 shotguns, 7 AR-15's, and 31 pistols. The guns were packaged in boxes and covered in foil enroute to cross the Mexico border.

A passenger in the vehicle, who claimed possession of the firearms, was discovered to be in the country illegally and was in violation of federal firearm regulations. Ultimately, the ATF adopted the case and the passenger was released to the custody of HSI.

I also want to touch on the topic of drug trafficking.

In the first eight months of this year, troopers have made 6,175 drug arrests; this is a 4% increase over last year. These arrests include large and small amounts of illicit drugs, but the numbers continue to rise.

In 2023, troopers have seized 377 pounds of methamphetamines; an 11% increase over 2022. 613 pounds of cocaine has also been seized during the same time; a 114% increase. Here's an example:

In March, a Trooper stopped a vehicle on IR-480 in Cuyahoga County for a traffic violation. After an OSHP canine alerted to the vehicle, a probable cause search revealed 220 pounds of methamphetamine and 13.2 pounds of cocaine in a crate in the cargo area of the vehicle.

Similarly, we have seen increases in Heroin (40%) and Opiate pill (87%) seizures.

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug on the market. As you know, a very small dose (2 mg) can be lethal; especially for an unknowing user. In 2023, troopers have seized 114 pounds – or nearly 26 million fatal doses. Last year, Troopers stopped a vehicle on IR-70 in Madison County for marked lanes violations. After OSHP canine alerted to the vehicle, and a probable cause search revealed 97.0 pounds of fentanyl.

These are real life examples of criminal organizations who are methodically operating in our state and our country. They use our roadways in furtherance of their criminal enterprises. Their goal is profits; they have no regard for the quality of life or the safety of our residents. No community is immune from being affected by their operations.

Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the House Homeland Security Committee, I again thank you for today's opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio State Highway Patrol in support of House Bill 230. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.