



Proponent Testimony to HB 473

Susan Petersen, Women's Caucus Chair

House Homeland Security Committee

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Chair Ghanbari, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation.

My name is Susan Petersen, and I am the founder of the law firm -Petersen and Petersen in Geauga County. I am also the Chair of the Women's Caucus for the Ohio Association for Justice (OAJ). As the voice of the plaintiff's bar in Ohio, OAJ is dedicated to preserving individuals' rights under the Seventh Amendment and Article I of Ohio's Constitution, both of which guarantee Ohioans the inviolate right to a trial by jury of their peers in civil cases. The essence of our organization is trial lawyers helping people.

House Bill 473 is the result of our commitment to making Ohio safer. At the start of last year, our Women's Caucus formed a committee to develop legislation that addresses the specific challenges faced by Ohioans, particularly women. One of our esteemed members, trial lawyer Lori Luka, brought to our attention the tragic story of Joyce Reichard, a Women's Caucus member who lost her husband to a random act of violence at an Ohio rest stop. Joyce's story, which you will hear today, underscores the urgent need for increased security at these locations.

We also had Gina DeGenova, the first female prosecutor of Mahoning County, speak to our group about the prevalence and devastating impact of human trafficking in Ohio. She highlighted how Ohio's rest stops have become hubs for this heinous activity. Gina will be providing her testimony today to further educate us on the critical need for this bill.

Additionally, we were deeply moved by Carolyn Kinkoph, an Ohio mother who lost her daughter to human sex trafficking. She spoke to the OAJ Women's Caucus and shared her heart-wrenching story, which she has shared in her witness testimony. Her experience demonstrates the real-life impact and devastation caused by human trafficking in our state.

It was through these stories that our OAJ Women's Caucus was inspired to create an initiative focused on making Ohio's rest stops safer. As an organization of trial lawyers, we are committed to enacting legislation that genuinely helps people, with a particular emphasis on the women of Ohio.



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We then connected with Representative Lauren McNally, who listened to our ideas, our stories, and our mission. This collaboration resulted in House Bill 437. It is with immense pride that I present this testimony on behalf of our organization in support of this critical legislation.

As a trial lawyer with 26 years of experience in fighting for truth and justice in Ohio, making our communities safer has always been a cornerstone of my career. This legislation is crucial for our group because, from a legal perspective, video evidence is invaluable in both civil and criminal cases. It acts as an impartial witness, providing clear and objective accounts of events. In civil cases, like those I prosecute, video footage can substantiate claims and accurately demonstrate the sequence of events, leading to fairer outcomes and ensuring justice is served.

For Ohio's prosecutors, video evidence is an equally powerful tool in building strong cases against perpetrators of crimes. It can confirm the identity of suspects, capture the sequence of events, and provide undeniable proof of criminal activities. In human sex trafficking cases, where victims are often too afraid or traumatized to speak the truth, video evidence can be the evidence needed in securing convictions and dismantling trafficking networks.

The impact of security cameras, like those proposed in HB 437, was profoundly felt by my family recently. Our cousin Sarah Wilkinson tragically lost her 43-year-old husband, Patrick, to a senseless act of violence. Patrick, a musician, had just finished playing at an event and was on his way home at 10:30 on a Sunday night when he accidentally took a wrong exit. While stopped at a red light and looking at his phone for directions, he lightly tapped the car in front of him. What happened next was only revealed thanks to a security camera on a nearby building.

The footage showed Patrick and the occupants of the other car getting out and agreeing there was no damage. However, as Patrick drove away, the man from the other car pulled out a gun and shot Patrick in the head, killing him instantly. My cousin is now a widow and a mother of two young boys because of this heinous act. Without that security camera, Sarah might never have known what happened, and Patrick's killer might never have been found and arrested. Because of the footage, law enforcement was able to track down the perpetrator and bring some measure of justice for Sarah and her children.

This personal experience aligns with research on a national level on the effectiveness of security cameras. For instance, a study by the Urban Institute found that surveillance cameras in cities like Baltimore and Chicago significantly reduced crime rates, even in areas not directly covered



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by the cameras. See <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-surveillance-cameras-can-help-prevent-and-solve-crime>. The Urban Institute, a reputable organization funded primarily by foundations, corporate philanthropies, and public agencies, provides in-depth research and data to support community well-being. Their study concluded that in Chicago, every dollar spent on camera systems saved the city over four dollars in costs associated with crimes averted.

Additionally, a study highlighted by the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office supports the notion that public surveillance cameras can help reduce crime rates and enhance public safety.

<https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/RIC/Publications/cops-w0614-pub.pdf> This study found that strategically placed cameras in cities like Newark, NJ, resulted in statistically significant reductions in auto thefts and improved crime clearance rates. The study states: "Surveillance cameras alone are not a silver bullet, but simply another crime control and investigative tool."

These studies underscore the critical importance of installing cameras at Ohio's rest stops as proposed in House Bill 473. Putting all of this together for you today, I am reminded of the true essence of our organization, the Ohio Association for Justice - trial lawyers dedicated to helping people and fighting for what is right. House Bill 473 perfectly embodies this mission and represents the culmination of our Women's Caucus' tireless efforts to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Ohioans, particularly women. By installing cameras at rest stops, we can deter crime, aid in the apprehension of perpetrators, and provide some peace of mind to the countless women who rely on these facilities every day. HB 473 is a proactive measure that has the potential to save lives and spare families the unimaginable pain of losing a loved one to senseless violence and exploitation.

So, I ask you, not just as a representative of the Ohio Association for Justice, but as a woman, a mother of four young adults, a sister, and a daughter - please support House Bill 473. Stand with us in our mission to create a safer Ohio for all. Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to justice, protection, and the inviolable rights of every Ohioan.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support House Bill 473.