

Ohio Department of Public Safety
Testimony of Director Andy Wilson
House Finance Subcommittee on Public Safety
March 7, 2023

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the committee, I am Andy Wilson, the Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. It is an honor to appear before you today to present the DeWine Husted Administration's operating budget for the Ohio Department of Public Safety for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

It is hard to believe that it was just over two months ago that I had the honor of being appointed by Governor DeWine to lead the dedicated employees of the Department of Public Safety as Director. To say that it has been an interesting, exciting, and inspiring two months doesn't come close to accurately describing what an experience this has been.

Within the first six weeks of this job, I found myself going door to door in the middle of the night with members of the Ohio State Highway Patrol warning the citizens of East Palestine, Ohio, about the imminent risk that a rail car full of hazardous materials was close to having a catastrophic explosion that could seriously injure or kill them.

I also sat in the incident command post where state emergency management officials worked with local and regional emergency responders to ensure that the citizens of that town were helped and cared for.

I have seen firsthand how our DPS employees regardless of which division they work for are focused on carrying out the department's mission to save lives, reduce injuries and loss, administer the State's motor vehicle laws, and preserve the safety and well-being of all Ohioans.

Through everything I have observed, I can tell you without hesitation that I am proud of these public servants and I am honored to be their director. I am joined today by the DPS senior leadership team. Each member of this executive group is a mentor, a role model, and is expected to lead by example.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol Superintendent, Colonel Charles Jones will join me to speak about Governor DeWine's priorities for the Highway Patrol in this budget. The remaining members of our team are available to help answer questions that you have about their divisions.

Like me, they are incredibly proud of the men and women they serve with. I hope they get the opportunity to answer your questions and highlight the great work their divisions are doing.

I want to spend some time talking about each of the Department's divisions, a few highlights of their important work since the last time DPS was in front of this committee two years ago, and any major new investments that are included in this budget submission.

The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles

I will start with a division that your constituents interact with at a higher rate than almost any other function of state Government, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Ohio BMV Registrar Charlie Norman is with me this afternoon. Over the past four years, the DeWine/Husted Administration has worked to ensure that every Ohioan has a variety of options for interacting with the BMV through our important modernization efforts.

In June 2022, Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted announced new online BMV services, including the ability to renew a driver's license or process person-to-person title transfers entirely online. The BMV has also deployed 24 self service kiosks around the state with 5 more coming online in the next month. For our new drivers, the BMV has also rolled out the opportunity to take the driving knowledge test online. These enhanced service options have accounted for over 3-million transactions and saved trips to the BMV.

As proud as we are of these new initiatives, many Ohioans still choose to visit one of the BMV's 179 Deputy Registrar locations in person and interact with the private sector employees who help them to obtain or renew their driver's license and vehicle registrations, help them register to vote, and assist them in signing up to be a potential organ donor. Under the Governor's leadership, the BMV has also made that process more streamlined through the implementation of the Get-In-Line Online virtual queuing system. Since the system was implemented in 2019, Ohioans have saved over 520,000 hours of wait time by utilizing this Get-In-Line Online tool.

Finally, I want to highlight our BMV investigators who are an important asset for state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies. This section works thousands of cases each year, including identity theft, bank fraud, and vehicle theft, but it also provides support for human trafficking investigations, murder investigations, and nationwide organized crime and auto theft rings. It really is impressive the depth and breadth of cases they're involved with.

The Ohio Emergency Management Agency

I am pleased to be joined by Ohio EMA Director Sima Merick who oversees a division that most Ohioans interact with when they are facing some of the worst days of their lives, the days after they have been impacted by a natural or manmade disaster. As I already mentioned, over the last month or so, I have learned an incredible amount about how our emergency management agency mobilizes to help our citizens in their hour of need. The Ohio Emergency Management Agency coordinates the state's response to and recovery from disasters. When not in a disaster response and recovery mode, Ohio EMA is busy planning, preparing, and working on mitigation efforts to make your communities more sustainable in the face of future disaster events.

Over the past year, Ohio EMA managed four federally declared disasters and five state level disaster designations, distributed more than \$39 million in federal recovery and mitigation assistance, \$119 million in COVID-19 response and recovery assistance, and \$12 million in preparedness grants. These figures do not include the recent assistance EMA has been providing in Columbiana County. Part of that assistance has been using our regional coordination teams who have relationships with the local first responders and county level

emergency management agencies. At almost every meeting I have been to in Columbiana County, our regional coordinators have been present, assisting, advising, and helping their local counterparts. They are incredibly valuable members of the EMA team.

In addition to fully funding the activities you would expect of Ohio EMA, this budget includes an additional \$2 million to create a pilot State Hazard Mitigation Program. This is an idea that has already been implemented in at least 12 other states. We know that \$1 spent on mitigation yields \$6 in savings due to avoided future costs. This state level program would supplement the Federal Hazard Mitigation Program, which is estimated to have saved Ohio over \$24 million in avoided disaster damages.

The Ohio Division of EMS

The Ohio Division of EMS provides administrative functions for the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services (EMFTS). Rob Wagoner serves as the executive director for the Division of EMS and also serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the EMFTS Board.

The Division of EMS is responsible for:

- Certification of all emergency medical service and fire service providers in the state of Ohio and certification of fire and EMS instructors;
- Accreditation and chartering of fire and EMS training institutions and approval of EMS continuing education sites;
- Collection and analysis of data from over 2 million patient encounters each year by Ohio EMS agencies reported to the EMS Incidence Reporting System (EMSIRS);
- Support of the EMS for Children (EMSC) Committee; and
- Regulation of private medical transportation services.

The Division also provides grant funding to local EMS organizations for equipment, training, and research. Historically, the Division of EMS budget, both operations and grants, has been funded through court transfers of seat belt violation fines. Between FY18 and FY22, revenue from seatbelt fines declined 48% which caused a 30% reduction in total EMS grant funds awarded. The bottom line is this, seatbelt fine revenue no longer provides sufficient cash to support the costs of both EMS operations and EMS grants.

The EMS grants are incredibly important, especially to Ohio's smaller EMS agencies. Many of these rural volunteer EMS agencies, which often times also provide fire service response, rely on the grant funding to purchase equipment or obtain training that they would not otherwise be able to afford. Some examples of equipment purchases made with these grant dollars include immobilization and extraction equipment, motorcycle removal kits, personal protective equipment, and decontamination kits.

I am pleased to report that our proposed budget will move EMS operations to the General Revenue Fund. This will free up the seatbelt fine revenue to fully support EMS grants. With this

change, grant funding for our local EMS partners will be restored from \$600k this fiscal year to \$2.9M in each of the next two years.

The Office of Criminal Justice Services

The Office of Criminal Justice has been the primary division within ODPS supporting the DeWine Administration's criminal justice initiatives in coordination with our local partners. OCJS Executive Director Nicole Dehner is with us this afternoon.

What this office has accomplished recently in assisting local law enforcement agencies and first responders to address the specific needs of their communities is nothing short of amazing.

In the last budget and then again in the subsequent ARPA appropriation legislation, funding was established for violent crime reduction initiatives. These funds were designed not to tell local law enforcement how to do their jobs, but rather to support those on the front lines of their communities with resources and technology to help them best protect the citizens they serve.

Both the budget and subsequent ARPA funding sought to address the biggest issue that is facing many of our local public safety partners which is the ability to recruit and retain our first responder professionals and our need to provide for the mental, physical, and emotional wellness of the men and women who choose this challenging career.

To date, the Office of Criminal Justice Services has awarded \$79 million in violent crime reduction grants to 159 agencies, and when the entirety of the ARPA awards have been finalized, we fully expect funds will have reached all 88 Ohio counties.

Additionally, OCJS continues to support law enforcement and victim service providers in a number of other areas, including anti-human trafficking efforts, for which we are seeking to support several new initiatives including: dedicated human trafficking data analysts, a special focus on illicit massage businesses, and funding for emergency shelter, behavioral health and interpretation services for victims, as well as a data project to shed light on the prevalence of human trafficking and the needs of the supportive service providers.

In addition to the violence reduction and recruiting and wellness grants, In the last budget, the General Assembly provided funding to allow local agencies to start or improve their body worn camera programs. This initiative was extremely well received and has allowed many agencies to provide their officers with body worn cameras that were unable to do so in the past.

Over the biennium, OCJS awarded nearly \$10 million in body-worn camera grants to over 200 local law enforcement agencies to help with costs related to camera equipment, video storage, and public record management personnel. The number of requests for these items has far exceeded the amount of funding available, which is why we are eager to continue this program to support the needs of law enforcement in the field and bring greater transparency to communities.

An additional undertaking will be for OCJS to work through the Collaborative Police Community Advisory Board to pursue a statewide accreditation program for law enforcement, with a goal

of making accreditation attainable, meaningful, and affordable. Ohio will be first in the nation to create such a program free to law enforcement agencies, reducing agency liability, risks, and costs while providing transparency for the community. The goal is not to compete with national accrediting bodies, but rather to provide an achievable program specific to the needs of Ohio law enforcement agencies.

Ohio Homeland Security

Ohio Homeland Security is our division tasked with analyzing threats and vulnerabilities and sharing information to increase awareness while developing strategies to prevent and protect against terrorism and other threats to public safety. Acting Executive Director Janille Stearmer is with us this afternoon.

As Ohio's primary fusion center, the Statewide Terrorism Analysis & Crime Center (STACC), facilitates the gathering, analysis, and sharing of critical information in a timely and effective manner. It operates 24/7, providing first responders, private sector managers, and other partners with quick, accurate, actionable intelligence and information.

Ohio Homeland Security's Cyber Security program works to improve Ohio's cybersecurity protection and response posture, working closely with Cyber Ohio to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted statewide approach. Cyber analysts serve as the primary point of contact for intelligence and information sharing on cyber threats and incidents in the state of Ohio and assist law enforcement and community partners with a wide variety of cyber protection and response capabilities including sharing early threat warnings and information on cybersecurity incidents, cyber-crime investigations, community education, and critical infrastructure protection activities.

Homeland Security's Intelligence Liaison Officer (ILO) Program increases local, statewide, and regional intelligence collaboration among a diverse range of sectors to enhance street-level intelligence collection by training ILOs with the ability to recognize threat indicators and report suspicious activity. Ohio has over 1,000 ILOs in the field, with at least one ILO serving as a point of contact in every county across the state.

This budget will maintain operations in these important Homeland Security programs.

One new investment we are making in this budget is the modernization of the system we use to access and manage critical databases and communicate daily with our state and local partners on a variety of Homeland Security topics. This system is the Communication & Information Management System, or CIMS for short. CIMS has sector specific modules, distributes intelligence products at various levels of sensitivity, and provides training opportunities. It also is the portal for the Ohio scrap metal program and the Fire Emergency Response System.

CIMS was built in house at DPS over a decade ago and is our primary communication channel and information center for our homeland security partners. We need an upgrade and an opportunity to build out capacity and functionality, especially in cyber incident response and information sharing. There is a request in this budget of \$1 million each year to upgrade CIMS

from an inflexible proprietary system to an open-architecture system which will allow for improved security and reliability. This upgrade will also make it much easier to add future enhancements to meet the needs of a dynamic homeland security environment.

The Ohio School Safety Center

One of Governor DeWine's first initiatives at the Department of Public Safety was to create a single office that could consolidate federal, state, and local resources for school safety and easily disseminate them to Ohio's schools. The Ohio School Safety Center (OSSC), housed within DPS, is staffed by experts who wake up every day thinking about school safety.

The School Safety Center, led by Executive Director Emily Torok, continues to be a national leader in protecting our kids. OSSC provides a variety of services to schools and first responders ranging from education and training, to research on school-based incidents. The team conducts proactive social media scanning to help identify threats before they become an issue and also assist law enforcement with ongoing threat investigations.

They also operate a free, anonymous reporting system called the Safer Ohio School Tip Line, where tips are received 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. Tips can be anything from bullying, cyber security, transportation, threats of violence, self-harm, or unsafe conditions. Governor DeWine often stresses, if you see something, say something, and we will do something. The number to call or text to report a tip, is –844-SAFER-O-H.

Over the past four years, the General Assembly has worked with the Governor, DPS, and the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission to provide \$105 million to nearly 1,900 Ohio schools – both public and private. House Bill 45, which Governor DeWine signed into law earlier this year, will provide an additional \$112 million to the K-12 School Safety Grant Program and those much-needed funds are going out to Ohio's schools as we speak. The OSSC has also worked with the Ohio Department of Higher Education to issue \$10 million to state institutions for physical security upgrades. There was a total of 60 higher-ed awards for things like security cameras, lighting, door locks, and communication equipment.

This budget will help the OSSC continue to provide locally based supports that can help tailor solutions to each unique school building. Through a comprehensive approach that includes both physical and emotional safety – the OSSC partners with federal, state, and local entities to help prevent, prepare for, and respond to acts of violence. The proposed budget will continue our significant investment in school safety with \$9.1 million in each year dedicated to protecting Ohio's schools. We invite you to join the conversation about school safety by talking to your constituents, visiting the OSSC, meeting with our Statewide Student Safety Council, or attending our in-person School Safety Summit later this summer.

Ohio Traffic Safety Office

Keeping Ohio's drivers, especially our youngest drivers who are still learning to drive, safe on Ohio's roads is a priority for Governor DeWine. Data shows that young drivers under age 24 are involved in 31% of all crashes in Ohio. Youth-related fatal crashes have been steadily rising over the past three years with 296 fatalities in 2021 accounting for almost 24% of all fatal crashes.

The Ohio Traffic Safety Office, led by Executive Director Emily Davidson, is focused on turning those statistics around. We know that young people who complete drivers' education courses are significantly less likely to be involved in crashes. We also know that many young drivers wait until they are 18 years old to get their license in order to avoid the cost of taking drivers ed.

In December, Governor DeWine announced that OTSO would be providing grant funding to increase access to teen driver training for low-income Ohio families through the new "Drive to Succeed" scholarship program. Through this program, teens selected for a scholarship by grantee agencies will be able to attend an eligible Ohio-approved driving school in their area at little to no cost.

This proposed budget includes a \$12 million increase in funding for additional traffic safety initiatives. We will be targeting much of this new funding on initiatives to improve driver education with the following three goals in mind:

- Making driver education **more accessible** to more teens
- Providing **stronger education** (curriculum, standards, etc.)
- **Increasing capacity** of driver training schools to handle more students, more quickly

This funding reflects Governor DeWine's passion for keeping our roads safe and ensuring that young drivers have the best training available before getting behind the wheel.

The Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center

The Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center (ONIC) was established in 2019 when Governor DeWine signed an Executive Order creating an office focused on assisting Ohio's law enforcement agencies and drug task forces with investigative support.

The ONIC, led by Cindy Peterman, has offices in Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, and Cincinnati. All four ONIC locations feature state-of-the-art digital forensic and analytical tools to access and connect crucial digital evidence that could help law enforcement trace the drug trafficking organizations back to the ringleaders and suppliers. The ONIC provides much needed support to agencies who may otherwise not have access to these tools.

Since its inception, the ONIC has been able to:

- Disrupt drug trafficking operation in the state of Ohio and identify connections in major drug trafficking cases that were previously unknown.
- Act as a force multiplier with Ohio's law enforcement agencies for greater impact
- Identify and convict the source and supplier of drugs that have caused overdoses
- Identify and dismantle cyber drug trafficking networks
- Assist law enforcement in cases of drug-related violence
- Develop new strategies and new partnerships including increasing communications and collaborations on drug trends to the public and substance use disorder treatment providers

The ONIC has assisted with 3,200 criminal investigations and worked on 7,500 digital devices. In this budget proposal, we are placing additional emphasis on combatting drug-related violent crime. The budget allocates \$6 million per year for additional staffing, equipment, training, and software for existing ONIC locations to expand their ability to assist with these drug-related violent crime investigations.

Additionally, you will find language in the bill that codifies the ONIC in the Ohio Revised Code. The ONIC has proven itself to be a valuable resource to Ohio's law enforcement agencies, and this budget will ensure that it will continue to provide this support well into the future.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol

At this time, I would like to ask the Superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol, Colonel Charles Jones, to speak about some of the major accomplishments for the Patrol as well as their budget for the upcoming biennium.

<Colonel Jones will provide OSHP testimony>

Chairman Miller, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. At this time, our senior leadership team and I will be happy to answer any questions that the committee has.