

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, members and guests of the committee..

Thank you very much and it is my honor to provide proponent testimony in support of S.B. 53 in what I believe to be a proper correction of the Ohio Revised Code to allow for expanded hiring of desperately needed law enforcement officers across our great state, giving back local control and discretion to those who we profess to trust in protecting our most valuable assets in Ohio.

I come to you this morning as a 31-year US Air Force veteran having spent the last 10 years of my career as a Federal Law Enforcement qualified officer, and having commanded units on the State and Federal side who were charged with Airbase Defense, Security, and Law Enforcement both in Ohio and overseas. At issue in this bill is the removal of a restriction that takes away the authority and judgement of many local law enforcement organizations to hire peace officers below the age of 21 into their organizations.

There have been many questions raised about this bill and whether an 18-20 year old should be a Peace Officer in Ohio. The simple answer is, many already are. My personal experience is that we have hundreds of new military recruits who are sent off to academies and come back to Ohio as Federal Law Enforcement officers under the command of military officers like myself. The federal mission at Wright-Patterson AFB has a force of over 400 officers (more than 100 of mine were under the age of 21) who provide superb law enforcement service to the 32,000+ personnel and multitude of visitors to the base, the National Museum of the US Air Force, and surrounding off-base communities. The Ohio National Guard has a force of Military Police in the Army Guard, and Security Forces in the Air Guard who have a specific state mission of law enforcement under the direction of the Governor for Domestic Operations.

I raise this particular point to highlight the extensive initial training, supervision, oversight, and continuation training that makes these officers valued members of law enforcement. Their brothers and sisters who desire to start a career in civilian law enforcement should be allowed to do so. And under the careful, watchful eyes of our statewide academies' cadre, the local departments' trainers and supervisors, we should support the removal of the age restriction and allow the system to work. They will not all make it, and that is just as true for the 21 year old, or the 30 year old. They should have the opportunity to help in this undermanned career field as soon as they can.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today on this topic and stand ready to take any questions that you might have. Thank you.