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State Senator

5<sup>th</sup> Senate District**Terry Johnson**

State Senator

14<sup>th</sup> Senate District**Sponsor Testimony**

Senate Bill 255

Ohio Senate Health Committee

June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Senator Hackett, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee: Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 255. This bill makes several necessary changes to current law on coroners, autopsies, and death reporting.

The bill would require coroners to be either a medical doctor or a doctor of osteopathic medicine. This will ensure that all coroners in our state have the ability to sign death certificates, a key component of their role as coroner. Further, the bill clarifies that if a physician has an agreement with a physician's assistant or an advanced practice registered nurse, the physician shall be the one to complete and sign death certificates.

Additionally, Senate Bill 255 clarifies that when an autopsy is performed, in part or in full, the resulting autopsy costs—including transportation of the body—must be paid by the county in which the person died. A difference in this bill than a

similar bill we carried last General Assembly is that definition of the private practice of medicine includes performing an autopsy at the request of another coroner, hospital, business entity, institution of higher education, or any other person. Last General Assembly the bill excluded the performance of an autopsy at the request of another coroner from the definition of private practice of medicine.

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This legislation also addresses when autopsy records can be released to the media. If a coroner receives a written request from a journalist to view autopsy records before the autopsy is complete, Senate Bill 255 gives coroners discretion of whether or not to release those records. However, if the autopsy is complete, the records must be released when such written requests are received.

The bill also specifies that when coroners or deputy coroners provide expert testimony at trial, hearing, or deposition in a civil action, they shall be paid at a rate of \$350 per hour spent preparing for and giving that testimony.

Finally, the bill clarifies current law surrounding death reporting. When a person dies, any of the following individuals with knowledge of the death must now report that death to the coroner: a health care worker caring for the person, a member of the ambulance service or emergency squad, or a law enforcement agency.

Thank you again for your time and consideration of Senate Bill 255. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.