

Good Morning,

I am an Air Force Veteran and I am submitting written testimony in support of the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act and why I believe passing this bill, S.B. 237 is a matter of national security.

In January 2022, shortly before I was set to deploy to the Middle East, my pre-deployment preparation was hit with a major challenge. The owner of Cumberland Trail Golf Club in Pataskala, OH and Delaware Golf Club in Delaware Ohio, brought a SLAPP lawsuit against me designed to force me to sign an NDA. The goal of this NDA was to prevent me from making any statements regarding the fake reviews being used to defraud prospective tenants into signing leases with his property management company, T & R Properties. T&R Properties owner is one of the most litigious individuals in Ohio, and has filed countless lawsuits through his various

LLCS https://opencorporates.com/officers?utf8=%E2%9C%93&utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=p+ronald+sabatino&jurisdiction_code=&type=officers and several aliases' he uses. A video, taken from a 2018 city council meeting shows various individuals describing more about him. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqulCirqPmw>

In this video, the founder of T&R Properties, is referred to as a “Bully” and one individual states that *“Pretty much everybody you talk to that knows [him] is afraid to speak one word about anything. I don't understand why...maybe it's the bullying he does.... or to scare us to not be able to speak what we want.”* He then goes on to discuss some of the companies reviews ... *“and these are just reviews from the residents, that state, all of them say, maintenance never does their job when asked, carpet, lighting, appliances not working when new residents move in, poor management, and when I say poor management, every review that I have read in the last 72 hours states poor management, Bed Bugs, roaches, infested when new tenants move in, fight for months to get the matter fixed, never get them fixed.”* These statements, showing T & R Properties' poor reputation, occurred multiple years before I moved into the Residences at Scioto Crossing.

Clearly, T&R Properties realized how important it was to hide negative reviews which could prevent prospective residents from signing leases, as well as using fake positive reviews. Unfortunately, I was not aware of the fake reviews, and after reading so many 5 star reviews, and seeing the 4.9/5 review score, I moved into a T & R Properties community in Dublin, Ohio called The Residences at Scioto Crossing.

Immediately after moving in, I noticed the apartment had numerous issues, the washer/dryer didn't function properly, the water heater was malfunctioning for months, trash was frequently overflowing at the compactor, and more. I was getting headaches all the time in the apartment, and once summer rolled around, I found out my air conditioner had been leaking Freon, which explained my headaches. I was confused at how The Residences at Scioto Crossing had such high reviews, and I did some research and I found out that T & R Properties was using fake employee written reviews across their apartment complexes to greatly increase the scores. I began posting about it online. I asked T & R Properties if I could move without penalty, but they wanted me to remove my review and sign an NDA; but I declined. I realized that others had probably discovered what the company was doing before me but likely had all signed the NDAs. I didn't want to take the easy way out and felt it was my duty to warn others that this company was fraudulently misrepresenting their apartment complex with fake reviews written by staff. I also let T & R Properties know that I would be ending my lease with my military orders through

the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and would not sign their NDA. They expressed that they would end my lease as soon as they received my military orders.

When I presented my military orders, they reneged, and demanded I sign an NDA which would prohibit me from mentioning their fake reviews and force me to remove all posts I had previously made, despite the fact that my statements were all true. I declined to do so, and stated that if they would not follow the law to allow me to end my lease with my deployment orders; I would continue to pay my rent and would seek the return of my rent through the court system. Their attorney replied that I could turn in my keys and I did so. However, their attorney was acting in bad faith, and told me to do this to lay the groundwork to file a meritless SLAPP lawsuit. The goal of the lawsuit would be to offer to drop the lawsuit against me if I signed the NDA.

T & R Properties director of I.T., using an alias, began following me online, and sent me a message. We had a brief conversation, in which he claimed that he was a military service member working at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. This was the same Air Force base that I worked at during this timeframe. I became suspicious and dug through his post history. Months prior to messaging me, he had made several negative posts about his boss, the founder of T & R Properties. Because of those posts, I was able to determine his true identity. I caught him doing this, and began posting about how T & R Properties had an employee on the social media app reddit that was intentionally lying about his affiliation with the company.

I also filed complaints with the Better Business Bureau and Ohio Attorney General's Office. Within a week after I filed my complaints, T & R Properties filed this SLAPP lawsuit against me. Because of the lawsuit that T & R Properties filed, both the Ohio Attorney General and Better Business Bureau stated they could no longer investigate my complaint because of the legal action that had been taken. When I replied to both entities stating that this incentivized companies to file lawsuits to negative customer complaints, I was ignored. T & R Properties issued me discovery requests and stated I had 28 days to turn them in, despite the fact that I was starting my deployment orders in less than two weeks. I was under a tremendous amount of stress and had to turn down a paid pre-deployment vacation event for deployers and their families to visit Orlando Florida, so that I could work on responding to the lawsuit T& R Properties had filed against me.

While I was deployed to the Middle East, T & R Properties attorney continued to harass me in an attempt to get court proceedings scheduled during my deployment. An anonymous person started sending concerning messages to [Airforce.com](https://www.airforce.com) while I was deployed, and I believe that person was the T & R Properties Director of I.T. who messaged me previously impersonating a military servicemember. I have asked T & R Properties to provide me the logs of what websites this employee was accessing on Monday July 11th between 8am -1pm, which would prove it was him, but they have thus far not done so, and I assume they will try and destroy that evidence.

I completed my deployment and am now a veteran, and T&R Properties has given me an ultimatum, either sign the NDA or this legal process will go on for years. I will not sign the NDA because I believe as soon as I do they will sue another individual who also posted about the way T & R Properties manipulates reviews. This company has been able to control my life for over two years now through this lawsuit. They have caused me stress every day for over two years now. Under oath, their director of I.T. admitted he had contacted me, but claimed he couldn't recall if he had impersonated a military servicemember. He blocked me to destroy the evidence, but I took screenshots of it before he blocked me. When I was given the opportunity to re-enlist

in the US Air Force in December 2023, I declined due to this lawsuit. I knew this company would continue to use frivolous lawsuits to harass me, and the stress from it was a detriment to the mission. After a career where I had been selected as the top graduate of my technical training, Airman of the Quarter for my Airlift Wing, and the recipient of multiple medals, I decided I would need to put my military career on pause while I worked on this lawsuit.

Due to the lack of laws in Ohio protecting individuals from these types of frivolous lawsuits, I know that T & R Properties can drag this on for years, and definitely have the resources to do it. Aside from the golf clubs they own, they also own the Dublin, Ohio based homebuilder Today Homes. At one point, I found out that all of the five star reviews for Today Homes were written by employees of the company's founder. Additionally, T & R Properties received \$1.3 million in taxpayer funded dollars through the Small Business Administration PPP loan program. The "loan" was forgiven and they never had to pay it back. I am hoping this bill can be passed so that individuals can no longer use these types of lawsuits to interfere with the duties of military service members.

Thank you for reading this.