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Testimony of Monica Nieporte

Ohio News Media Association

Senate Bill 237 – Uniform Public Expression Protection Act Senate Judiciary Committee

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 237, the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act. I want to thank the bill sponsors, Senators Gavarone and Manning, for bringing this legislation forward.

The Ohio News Media Association (ONMA) has long advocated for enactment of an anti-SLAPP law in Ohio. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, or SLAPP, are defamation cases brought against individuals who are exercising their first amendment rights. These cases are dismissed; however, they can last for many months and through multiple appeals.

While these are important protections for all citizens, media outlets have been common targets of these lawsuits. In fact, newspapers in Ohio have been sued for defamation simply for running an article, editorial, or even a political cartoon. The goal of these suits is not to prevail and receive damages, but to stifle and suppress protected expression.

Senate Bill 237 would establish a motion for expedited relief that could be filed in instances where a citizen or entity feels they are exercising their first amendment rights. SB 237 does not modify Ohio's defamation laws in any way, and both parties would retain all legal remedies even if the motion were granted. The bill simply creates a process for true SLAPP cases to be adjudicated quickly.

This is a pro-first amendment piece of legislation and we urge your support. Past iterations of this bill have enjoyed broad bipartisan support from across the political spectrum. Thank you for your time and consideration.