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Ways and Means

Good morning, Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Smith, and esteemed members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 378, which permits homestead exemption for surviving spouses of service members, otherwise known as the Gold Star Widow's bill.

A Gold Star widow is the spouse of someone who is lost in the line of duty. It's been said that when a servicemember or first responder takes their oath of induction, they are writing a blank check potentially for their life. This can be an incredibly uncomfortable reality to face especially for those who have a family to support. In the event of their death, they want to know that their spouse and children will be taken care of in their absence.

With the rise of property taxes in Ohio, one less thing a Gold Star widow should have to worry about is how they are going to be able to stay in their home. House Bill 378 aims to authorize a full exemption on property taxes for the surviving spouse of a military member, first responder, or EMT killed in the line of duty. Virginia has passed a similar bill, and it is my hope that Ohio will do the same.

We ask a lot of our servicemembers and first responders. What we don't see are the sacrifices the families of our military servicemembers and first responders make behind the scenes. While nothing can ease the pain of losing a loved one, reducing the burden from a property tax standpoint will help to ensure the widow does not have to worry about this

significant cost of home ownership. I would like to thank all those who have given their lives in the line of duty to protect us.

I would also like to thank their families for the sacrifices they make. I would especially like to thank Ms. Jane Horton, who first brought this concept to my attention. Ms. Horton is herself a Gold Star widow, whose husband, Specialist Christopher Horton, was killed in Afghanistan in 2011. She has been a huge help in providing me with the resources and information to help make this bill possible. Thank you, Jane!

Thank you again Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Smith, and esteemed members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 378, the Gold Star Widows Bill.