

Testimony of Joe Everetts
President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association
Owner of the Montgomery and Mason, Ohio BMV Offices

Before the House Finance Committee, March 11, 2025
In Support of Operating Budget Proposed Amendment No.
HC_136_0563: BMV Service Fees

Good morning, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Davilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee. I'm Joe Everetts, President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association and Deputy Registrar of the Montgomery and Mason BMV offices. Today, I'm asking for your backing on an amendment to the operating budget that adjusts our \$5.00 service fee to offset years of inflation and escalating expenses, ensuring our 180-plus local BMV offices don't shutter, leaving your constituents with fewer options and longer waits.

For 35 years, Deputy Registrars have run a lean operation as small business owners, sparing taxpayers over \$200 million annually. Yearly, we process over 15 million transactions, collect nearly \$1 billion for Ohio, and maintain 12-minute wait times—beating the national 44-minute average—with 97.74% satisfaction. Our employees handle and safeguard sensitive personal data for millions of Ohioans, screen and verify complex immigration paperwork, issue Real ID-compliant credentials, and root out fraud, navigating over 1,500 pages of BMV rules and procedures. They also keep up with ever-changing laws and procedures, helping keep Ohioans compliant and safe. We honor 100% disabled veterans with free services, register hundreds of thousands of voters annually, and raise millions for the Second Chance Trust Fund and Children's Save Our Sight program, stretching a \$5.00 fee unchanged since 2019.

That \$5.00 buys less every year. Inflation has eroded its value by 20%, but rising costs go far beyond inflation alone. Shortly after our last fee adjustment, the cost of paper and toner—essential for every transaction—was shifted onto Deputy Registrars, adding thousands of dollars in expenses per office. Meanwhile, wages have surged past inflation. Since 2019, Ohio's minimum wage has increased by over 25%, forcing wages higher across the board just to retain staff.

Last week, while testifying before the House Public Safety Committee, I mentioned a colleague was given five weeks' notice that her building was being demolished. The move brings a \$1,500 monthly rent increase and a \$65,000 buildout cost. Visiting dozens of BMV offices in the last year, I've seen the pay gap firsthand: one location has BMV clerks at minimum wage sitting beside title clerks earning \$4-\$5 more hourly. Another deputy registrar, who is also a clerk of courts, is forced to pay her BMV crew far less than her title team. As a result, she experiences much greater turnover on the BMV side. When the numbers stop adding up, offices close. Toledo's Madison Avenue closed

last year and remains so today, and Woodsfield is potentially next this June with no bidders. That will create an hour's commute for some. I believe most Ohioans would willingly pay a couple extra dollars—about a penny a day—for their license or tags if it meant keeping their local BMV open.

Our amendment—a user fee, not a state cost nor a tax—updates our rate to sustain this system. Without it, more locations will close, forcing Ohioans further from reliable service they count on. Even with this adjustment, Ohio's costs to register—like a 2024 Blazer at \$36 to \$66—stay far below West Virginia and Michigan at over \$200, Kentucky at nearly \$300, and Indiana at over \$400.

Our staff's expertise in safeguarding sensitive documents, issuing licenses and IDs, and stopping fraud has kept Ohioans compliant and safe for over 30 years. This adjustment sustains that model, keeps skilled workers onboard, and funds tools to further improve service, ensuring quick, easy access across your districts.

Thank you.