

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 476, which would authorize charitable nonprofit organizations to sell raffle tickets online.

House Bill 476 is a focused piece of legislation aimed at supporting nonprofit organizations by explicitly legalizing the sale of online raffle tickets, a method that has been commonly used in Ohio for many years. Recently, the Ohio Attorney General issued cease and desist letters to several organizations, stating that online raffle ticket sales violate the current Ohio Revised Code. HB 476 seeks to address this issue by codifying online raffle sales, ensuring that nonprofit organizations can continue to raise funds in this manner. HB 476 would restore clarity and security to nonprofit fundraising efforts, allowing these organizations to focus on serving their communities without legal uncertainty.

Chief Eric McFarren – Address to the Ohio House of Representatives

Good afternoon, members of the House.

My name is Eric McFarren, and I currently serve as the Chief of Police for a small department here in the Great State of Ohio. I've spent nearly thirty years in law enforcement, and I've seen a lot of changes during that time — some for the better, and some that have made it increasingly hard for small-town departments like mine to keep up.

Today, I want to talk to you about something that every chief of a village department understands all too well — how difficult it has become to stay competitive and keep good police officers.

People ask me all the time:

“Doesn't the Village provide what you need to operate your department?”

And my honest answer is: Yes... but not really.

Yes — we have a supportive community and a budget that lets us function day-to-day. But that budget” doesn't allow us to offer competitive wages.

It doesn't cover major capital improvements.

And it doesn't always let us replace our equipment when it should be replaced.

When I first started in law enforcement almost three decades ago, we saw a gradual, steady increase in the cost of safety equipment — the kind of thing you could plan for. But over the past five years, those costs have skyrocketed.

A pair of uniform pants that used to cost around sixty dollars is now about a hundred and ten.

A long-sleeved shirt that was fifty is now ninety — and that's not top-of-the-line gear.

When you add up department-issued gear and what officers personally buy, you're looking at roughly ten thousand dollars' worth of equipment that an officer carries or wears every single day.

And if you talk to our brothers and sisters in the fire service — they're facing even higher costs. I spoke with our Fire Chief recently, and just their basic protective clothing runs around twelve thousand dollars — that's before you even start adding in air tanks or specialized tools.

So, like any good problem-solvers, we started looking for creative solutions.

A few community members and I began discussing the idea of starting a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to support our police department — modeled after a local fire department that's had great success doing this.

They raise money through online raffles, and every dollar goes right back into the department — buying safety gear, replacing outdated equipment, and funding improvements that simply wouldn't be possible through the normal budget process.

Now, I understand — the word raffle can make some people uneasy. A few bad actors in the past have given these efforts a bad name. But times have changed.

Today, online raffles are traceable, transparent, and auditable.

Every ticket purchase leaves a digital record — a name, a phone number, and a payment trail. That's accountability.

And I completely agree — there should be clear, statewide rules for how these raffles are conducted and how winners are drawn.

Frankly, most of us in public safety welcome that. Because we want the process to be fair, honest, and above board.

When someone buys a raffle ticket online, they're not just taking a chance to win something —

They're investing in their local safety services.

And because these raffles are local, the odds are much better than any lottery.

It truly becomes a win-win situation: the community benefits, and the department gains the resources it needs to keep its officers safe and effective.

Members of the House — thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to listen, and for considering this idea.

Just by doing that, you're showing that you stand with the men and women who serve your communities every single day.

On behalf of myself, my department, and public safety professionals across the state —

thank you for not turning away from this issue, but for choosing instead to be part of the solution.

Thank you.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 476, and I urge swift passage. - I welcome any questions the committee has at this time.