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Thomas Hall
State Representative

May 6th, 2025

Rep. Hall HB 203 Sponsor Testimony

Chair Thomas, VC Matthews, Ranking member Issacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 203, Aspen Runnels' Law. This important legislation was brought to me from constituents in my district as a result of a recent tragedy.

In May of 2024, Aspen Runnels had just finished another day at Lakota East Freshman school and was attempting to walk towards another Lakota Local Schools building when Aspen was struck and killed by a motorist. The Butler County Sheriff's Office traffic unit was called to the scene to conduct their investigation. Months later, after the judicial process, the driver who struck Aspen plead guilty to the incident of a misdemeanor charge of vehicular homicide. Yes, just a misdemeanor. After consulting with many, including the Butler County Sheriff's office, all were in shock that the highest crime committed in this situation resulted in a M1.

The family, friends, and community took their pain and sorrow and turned it into action. They worked diligently with local, county, and state officials to bring about change. I assure you if there was an idea out there to make the road or area safer for students, they thought of it and spent many hours working on solutions. HB 203 is a result of those conversations and solutions. I applaud Aspen's mother, Christina Alcorn, Trisha Parnell, and the many, many people who helped in getting us to where we are today.

Aspens Law is quite simple in nature. It will enact the following:

- Increase the penalties for vehicular manslaughter and vehicular assault that involve speeding or the commission of a traffic offense in an active school zone.
- Double the fine for certain traffic offenses that occur in an active school zone.
- Establish additional requirements for driver's license reinstatement that apply to an offender who committed vehicular homicide or assault in an active school zone, including completion of a remedial driving course.
- Establish requirements governing the posting of signage in school zones warning motorists of the bill's increased penalties.
- Entitle the bill "Aspen Runnels Law."

According to current laws, we treat active construction zones in this state differently than active school zones. As we all travel from different places to Columbus, I am sure that we are all familiar that active construction zone penalties are different and often found to be doubled. This bill would treat ACTIVE school zones the same way. I would also point out to the members of this committee; the bill analysis will show you some of the changes we are considering between current penalties the changes sought in HB 203.

An important point I want to make sure members of the committee notice is this bill only applies to active school zones. I must admittedly say I believe there needs to be more work done by members of this committee to better define what an active school zone is.

Chair Thomas and members of the committee, I thank you for the time to present testimony and will now turn it over to my joint sponsor, Representative Williams, before taking any questions from members of the committee.