

**44<sup>th</sup> House District**

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**State Representative Joshua E. Williams**  
**Ohio House of Representatives**

Chairman Thomas, Vice-Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and fellow members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 203 today. I would also like to thank my joint sponsor, Representative Hall, for his work on this legislation.

As Representative Hall pointed out, this legislation presents a common-sense change to the way our active school zones are protected. Overall and under Governor DeWine specifically, Ohio has long pushed for an increased focus on our state's youth. By improving education, reading initiatives, child welfare, and many other aspects of childcare, we have made it a priority to foster a safe, well-rounded environment for children. It only makes sense that our school zones would be another example of stringent safety precautions and rigorous guidelines. But, as you've heard, our laws don't always match up to our priorities.

Shockingly, in the case of Aspen Runnels and other unfortunate incidents in the past, it is possible under current Ohio law to case the death of a student due to reckless driving in an active school zone and receive merely a first-degree misdemeanor. For context, other crimes that could result in a first-degree misdemeanor include driving with a

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suspended license and petty theft of property under \$1,000. Though also serious, these crimes should never be treated the same as an action that causes the death of a child.

That's why Representative Hall and I have introduced HB 203, named in honor of Aspen Runnels. Though we can't change what happened, we can seek to provide adequate justice for all victims and further promote the ideals of student safety and responsible driving. Just as we protect our construction workers on highways and work zones, we must offer similar protections to our most vulnerable groups. We hope you see the urgent need for this legislation; kids around the state should never worry for their safety in our institutions, and now is the time to make this a reality.

Chairman Thomas, Vice-Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you again for the chance to speak in favor of HB 203. We welcome any questions you may have.