Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Minority Member Isaacsohn, and esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 372 (the Larry Henderson Act). My name is Jon Harvey, President for the Ohio Professional Association of Fire Fighters - representing over 14,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical personnel across Ohio. On behalf of our members and the communities they protect, we support HB 372 and commend Representative Abrams and Plummer for introducing this legislation.

HB 372 would provide long-sought parity and enhanced protection for fire fighters and first responders, emphasizing their integral role in public safety and the need for maximum deterrence against targeted attacks.

HB 372 Highlights

Enhanced Deterrence and Protection: Including fire fighters within the protected classes recognizes the inherent danger of firefighting work, especially as assaults and fatalities have increased for public safety personnel.

Parity with Law Enforcement: Fire fighters often face similar risks and threats as police officers and should be afforded equal statutory protection. Equalizing penalties for offenders who murder first responders reflects the reality that all first responders are essential in crisis and deserve robust protection under law.

Honoring Service and Sacrifice: HB 372 recognition of prior service acknowledges that the risks associated with being a firefighter extends beyond active duty. Perpetrators who target these individuals should not escape maximum punishment simply because a victim is retired or no longer active.

Support for Survivor Families: Families of fallen fire fighters seek justice and reassurance that perpetrators will not be eligible for parole. Ensuring life without parole or the death penalty helps provide closure and affirms state support for the fire service community.

The Last Alarm

Senseless acts of violence that strike at the very heart of who we are and the work we do every day to protect the communities we love. For fire fighters who work with the purest of intentions, who took an oath to put their lives on the line, to risk their lives for others, to be murdered is beyond tragic. I stand before you and pray for:

-Hamilton Firefighter Patrick Wolterman (December 28, 2015)
-Cleveland Firefighter Johnny Tetrick (November 19, 2022)
-Wayne County Firefighter-Paramedic Paul Mickolick (April 18, 2025)

Patrick Wolterman, age 28, was killed in an intentionally set arson fire at 1310 Pater Avenue in Hamilton, Ohio. Wolterman, a newlywed who had been with the Hamilton Fire Department, died of smoke inhalation after falling through a floor weakened by a fire burning in the basement that had been deliberately set using gasoline.

Johnny Tetrick, age 51, a 27-year veteran of the Cleveland Division of Fire, was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver while responding to a rollover vehicle accident on Interstate 90 eastbound near Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Bratenahl.

Lt. Paul Mickolick, age 43, of the Town and Country Fire District, was struck and killed while assisting a driver whose Ford F-150 was stuck in a ditch on Stratton Road in Congress Township, Wayne County.

These documented cases demonstrate the real-world need for the enhanced protections proposed in HB 372 (the Larry Henderson Act). The intentional arson murder of Firefighter Wolterman and the vehicular homicide of Firefighter Tetrick illustrate that first responders face targeted attacks while performing their duties or as a result of their professional roles. The recent death of Firefighter-Paramedic Mickolick, while still under investigation, further underscores the dangers faced by Ohio's first responders when assisting the public off duty.

The bill's provisions expanding aggravated murder penalties to include first responders, fire fighters and our brother and sisters in military uniform, with mandatory sentencing of death or life without parole, directly address the threat environment documented in these Ohio cases.

Thank you, Rep. Abrams and Rep. Plummer, for your leadership in bring forth HB 372 (the Larry Henderson Act) to this legislature and we hope a favorable passage. I welcome any questions.

The Last Alarm

Dear Lord, we call upon you for strength and guidance. Give us courage that we may impart courage to others. When the gong sounds, calling us to our duty, give us speed and efficiency. As our sirens wail, ride with us through the city streets shielding us from danger. On the fireground may our officers and firefighters always work as a cautious, courageous and victorious team. Walk with us through the terror of flames and explosions. May our hearts be always ready if we are summoned before our Eternal Chief in the midst of our labors. We ask only that you may be pleased with our service. That when the Last Alarm shall have sounded for us, we may receive our eternal assignment with you.

Amen