Testimony in Support of Ohio House Bill 372 – The Larry Henderson Act

Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee as well as Representatives Cindy Abrams and Phil Plummer, we are Jon and Karen Ritter, the parents of Officer Jamieson Ritter, who was killed in the line of duty July 4, 2024. We are here today to speak to you regarding HB 372.

As staunch proponents of Ohio House Bill 372, the Larry Henderson Act, we urge the members of the Legislature to pass this critical measure without delay. This bill rightfully elevates the penalties for the aggravated murder of peace officers, prosecutors, first responders, and military members to either the death penalty or life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

In a time when our law enforcement heroes face unprecedented dangers, HB 372 sends a clear message: Ohio will not tolerate the senseless slaughter of those who protect and serve our communities. By eliminating lenient sentencing options and ensuring that cop killers face the ultimate consequences for their actions, this legislation honors the fallen, deters future violence, and restores faith in our justice system.

The tragic murders of Special Deputy Sheriff Larry Henderson and our son Police Officer Jamieson Ritter underscore the urgent need for this bill.

On May 2, 2025, Deputy Henderson was intentionally struck and killed by a vehicle while directing traffic in Cincinnati—a deliberate act that robbed Hamilton County of a dedicated public servant.

Similarly, on July 4, 2024, Cleveland Police Officer Jamieson Ritter was intentionally shot and killed in the line of duty in the 1500 Block of East 80th Street while attempting to apprehend a wanted suspect for killing his own grandmother, Beatrice Porter, by shooting her in the face with her own weapon. He then stole her handgun and used it to murder our son. An intentional act of violence - not once …but twice. A heartbreaking loss on our nation's Independence Day that highlighted the daily risks officers endure to keep us safe.

These brave men did not deserve to die, and their killers do not deserve the chance at parole or reduced sentences. HB 372, named in honor of Deputy Henderson, would ensure that such heinous crimes are met with unyielding justice and prevent families like ours and Deputy Henderson's from reliving their trauma in parole hearings and providing the opportunity for closure they deserve.

The rising attacks and murders against law enforcement demand stronger deterrents. Ohio's current aggravated murder statutes allow for parole eligibility in some cases, which undermines accountability and emboldens criminals.

By mandating death or life without parole for these targeted killings, HB 372 aligns Ohio with states that prioritize the safety of their officers and upholds the principle that an attack on one who wears the badge is an attack on society itself.

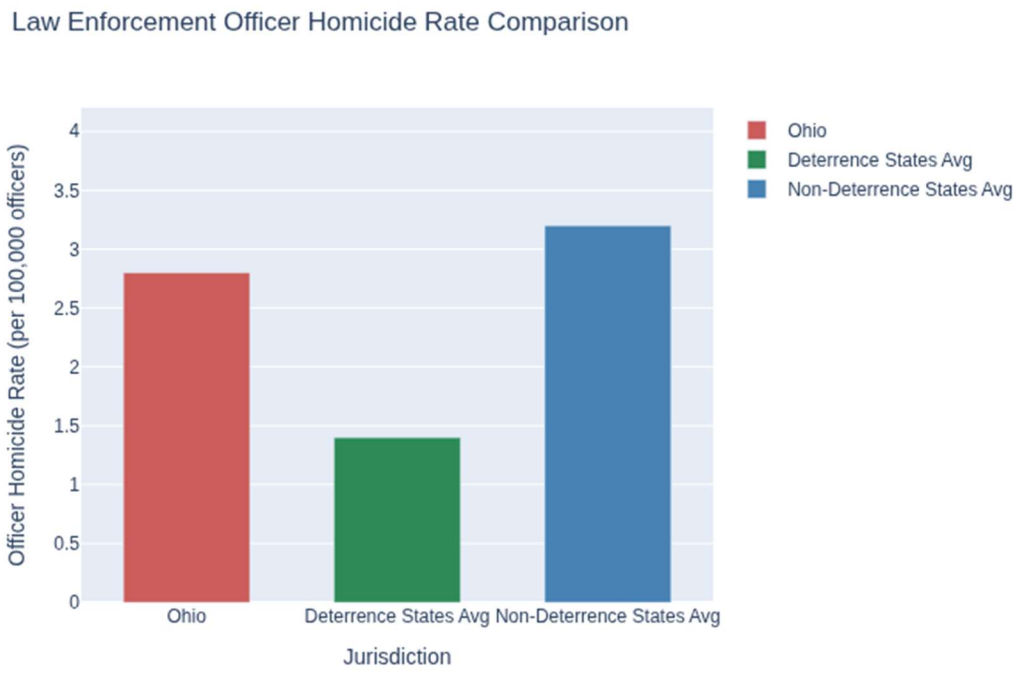
We call on all Ohioans—lawmakers, citizens, and fellow advocates—to rally behind this bill. Let us pass the Larry Henderson Act to protect our protectors and ensure that the legacies of heroes like Deputy Henderson and Officer Ritter inspire a safer future for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

The Deterrence Effect:

Recent data demonstrates the effectiveness of strong deterrence laws. The chart below compares Ohio's law enforcement officer homicide rate to the average rates in states with and without deterrence laws (death penalty or life without parole for cop killers):

This data shows that states with strong deterrence provisions have significantly lower officer homicide rates. Ohio's rate is closer to states without such laws, underscoring the urgent need for HB 372.



References

- Ohio Criminal Justice Data Snapshot – January 2025
- OhioMHAS Regional Psychiatric Hospital Data – FY 2023
- Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Recidivism Report – 2021
- National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund – Officer Fatality Reports
- FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program – Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA)
- U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics – Recidivism and Mental Health Reports
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health – First Responder Violence Statistics