

Testimony of Joe Everetts
President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association
Owner of the Montgomery and Mason, Ohio BMV Offices

Before the House Public Safety Committee, March 4, 2025
In Support of Operating Budget Proposed Amendment No.
HC_136_0563: BMV Service Fees

Good morning, Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee. I'm Joe Everetts, President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association and Deputy Registrar of the Montgomery and Mason BMV offices. On behalf of ODRA and the entire deputy registrar community, I am here to urge you to support an amendment to the Operating Budget adjusting our service fee to match what clerks of courts retain for standard title services. This increase is vital to preserve our over 180 local BMV offices and prevent closures that inconvenience your constituents.

We're small business owners partnering with the state since 1990, saving taxpayers over \$200 million yearly. In 2023, we handled 15.5 million transactions, delivered \$784 million to Ohio, and kept wait times at 12 minutes—far below the national average of 44—all with 97.74% satisfaction. Our employees manage sensitive data, screen immigration documents, issue Real ID-compliant licenses and IDs, and detect fraud, following over 1,500 pages of BMV procedures. They also stay current on ever-changing laws and procedures, adapting to new rules yearly to keep Ohioans compliant and safe. Each employee passes a BCI and FBI WebCheck to ensure trust. We proudly serve 100% disabled veterans for free, register hundreds of thousands of new voters annually, and collect millions in donations for the Second Chance Trust Fund and Children's Save Our Sight program—all while our fee has barely budged in 20 years.

Since 2019, inflation has cut our fee's value by over 20%, while costs have soared. Rent's climbing—a colleague near Cincinnati faces \$65,000 in BMV-compliant buildout expenses after being given five weeks' notice that her current building is to be demolished, a move that will cost her an additional \$1,500 per month in rent. Staffing is taking a hit too. I've lost two great assistant managers to the bank across the street simply because a starting pay of \$15/hour with no benefits can't compete. Others in our community are also losing quality employees to other businesses, with some leaving to work for the BMV itself. When locations become unviable, offices close—like on Madison avenue in downtown Toledo last year and potentially the sole location in Monroe County this June, where no one submitted a bid. Without that Woodsfield location it's an hour's drive for some to the next closest BMV.

This amendment, a user fee—not a state cost nor a tax—aligns our pay with clerks' title fees to keep our system alive. Without it, more closures loom, pushing Ohioans further from the great service they've expected from their Deputy Registrars for 35 years. I would also like to point out that even with this adjustment and in addition to the operating budget's potential registration changes, Ohio's costs to register—for example, a 2024 Blazer—stay way below Kentucky's \$280 or Indiana's \$416.

Chair Abrams, two weeks ago you asked the Public Safety Director if deputy registrars save taxpayers money and provide essential services—Director Wilson agreed and said we're vital for Ohioans' time. I couldn't agree more. Our employees' expertise in handling secure documents, issuing compliant ID's, registering vehicles and fighting fraud make that possible. Without this increase, that service falters. This amendment keeps offices open, retains quality staff, and lets us invest in tools to serve even better, preserving crucial access for your districts.

Thank you.