



INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 96

Keary McCarthy, Executive Director

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Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee, my name is Keary McCarthy and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Mayors Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of mayors in Ohio's largest cities and suburbs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party regarding the public safety provisions in House Bill 96.

Public safety is a critical priority for our mayors and police chiefs, and we appreciate the investments that have been proposed in HB 96. For municipalities across the state, public safety is almost always the largest single budgetary expenditure. In some cases, particularly for larger cities, public safety accounts for between 60 and 70 percent of the total general revenue fund budget. Just in Ohio's 30 largest cities, the total amount spent on public safety on an annual basis is over \$2.1 billion dollars. Personnel costs make up a significant share of these total costs and the demand on cities to attract, recruit, and retain law enforcement professionals has never been higher or more challenging.

In response to this challenge, our cities have increased pay and benefits to their law enforcement professionals, in some cases negotiating significant salary increases and allocating funds to invest in better technology, training, and equipment for first responders.

Our cities are grateful for the funds provided to local law enforcement through \$250 million in state grant programs for local law enforcement in the last operating budget. Over the past four years, our cities have received millions in state grants for body-worn cameras, first-responder wellness programs, and violent crime reduction and community violence intervention strategies. As we look ahead to the coming biennium, our cities are facing some hard choices about how to continue effective violence reduction efforts they founded with federal and state grant funds

Compounding our cities' challenges looking ahead is the consistently decreasing amount of support local governments have received from the state. Over the past 20 years, the state's contribution to the Local Government Fund has decreased by over 50 percent, and continues to decline when you adjust raw figures for inflation. In the "as introduced" version of HB 96, the LGF increases slightly from 1.7 to 1.75 percent of the total state general fund. The rate in 2008 was 3.68%. Modest increases to the LGF, while deeply appreciated, are not adequate to provide significant state support for our communities' investments in public safety. Today, I want to present an idea for more directly supporting public safety and our law enforcement officers across the state.

State Funding for Local Law Enforcement Agencies

The Ohio Mayors Alliance is proposing a new, dedicated public safety fund that would supplement cities, villages, and townships with funding to support public safety and local first responders. We envision this fund being a small percentage of state support to supplement the amount cities pay in total police and fire payroll.

This dedicated state fund for public safety and local first responders would be provided to eligible municipalities, villages, and townships to help address two critical needs:

- First, these supplemental state funds would be used by municipalities and villages to hire, train, and support local first responders, specifically high-quality firefighters and law enforcement professionals.
- Second, by tying these funds to the pursuit and completion of the State of Ohio Law Enforcement Standards established through the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board, these state funds will promote best practices and significantly improve professional standards in police departments across Ohio.

While grant programs are welcome, cities and police departments need consistent funding to address long-term costs and ongoing needs. Specifically, communities need dedicated funding assistance to help pay competitive wages, retain high-quality personnel, and hire more police officers and first responders. We strongly urge you to make explicit state support for our collective interest in ensuring that Ohio's local public safety forces have the personnel and resources they need to keep us safe.

Law Enforcement Training Funding & Cannabis Host Community Fund

Ohio law requires Ohio peace officers and troopers to receive between 24 and 40 hours of continued professional training (CPT) per year. We participated in the work of the Ohio Law Enforcement Training Study Commission in 2022 and continue to support its recommendations. However, as the Study Commission noted in its report: "CPT has been sporadically funded and inconsistently implemented in Ohio. As a result, other than firearms recertification, many officers receive little or no CPT some years. When the state does not provide the funding, officers are not required to take the training."

We are pleased to see that HB 96 proposes to maintain \$80 million in funding for CPT requirements for local law enforcement agencies. We believe that a dedicated funding stream for CPT remains a long-term need for our cities and local law enforcement agencies, and though we don't have a preference as to whether that funding comes from a specific tax source or the general revenue fund, we appreciate that Governor DeWine and the General Assembly have prioritized maintaining this funding.

We also strongly urge you to restore the host community fund to at least its current level of 36% as you consider the proposed marijuana tax revenue distribution changes in HB 96. There are many funding

needs, and we appreciate the Governor's intent to distribute funds to public safety needs, but local governments have made local policy decisions about allowing marijuana dispensaries in their communities based on the promise of being able to use tax revenue from the host community fund to bolster local needs - including, most crucially, public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.