

**UNION COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
PROBATE & JUVENILE DIVISIONS
UNION COUNTY, OHIO**

RICK RODGER
Probate and Juvenile Judge



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**House Public Safety Committee
Judge Rick Rodger
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 217
June 17, 2025**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the House Public Safety Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 217.

I am Judge Rick Rodger of the Union County Court of Common Pleas, Probate and Juvenile Divisions. Prior to joining the bench as Judge in the Common Pleas Court, I served as an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney since 1992 and has a private practice prior to that. Earlier this year, I was honored to serve on the Governor's Task Force: the Ohio Missing Persons Working Group

Background

The Ohio Missing Persons Working Group was established at the request of Governor Mike DeWine to determine how the State of Ohio can better support individuals and families who are missing family members and to bolster the efforts of law enforcement as they work tirelessly looking for these persons.. The Ohio Missing Persons Task Force was made up of individuals from around the State of Ohio consisting of various law enforcement agencies, both small and large departments, Children's Services, BCI, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; Ohio Criminal Justice Services, prosecutors, school personnel and family members of missing persons. One of the tasks of the working group was to examine challenges faced by law enforcement in these cases and to make recommendations on what Ohio can do to move the work forward to bring these missing individuals home as quickly as possible. This group met over the course of a number of months and discussed many topics ranging from law enforcement and their investigations; the difficulty in obtaining information in a timely manner; services that are currently available; the effects on the individuals and families that are left behind; and the importance of cooperation between many agencies to work efficiently and effectively to bring these individuals home. The group presented 18 recommendations to increase Ohio's response when handling missing persons cases; to better equip and/or provide resources to the teams of law enforcement across the State of Ohio, and to better respond to and support those individuals and families with missing persons. House Bill 217, if implemented, brings Ohio closer to meeting the goals of the Ohio Missing Person's working group.

Bill Highlights

I ask for your approval of HB 217. This proposed bill provides additional tools for law enforcement to implement during their investigations. This bill would require law enforcement to enter certain information about the missing individual directly into the NamUs database within thirty (30) days of receiving the report and requires them to provide updates after a child or other individual is found. NamUs allows for a central database of information

nationwide which can aid law enforcement when trying to find information about missing, unidentified or unclaimed individuals and provide closure for families. Per the NamUs website, in 2018 there were 11,000 sets of human remains that are unidentified and many families have not found out about their loved ones.

Another aspect of the proposed legislation would be to permit law enforcement to use the administrative search warrant process to gather data from personal information of a missing person such as cellular telephone or social media data which can aid in locating missing persons.

While serving on the taskforce, we heard from family members who are missing individuals within their families and the struggles that they and law enforcement have when investigating these cases all in the hope of bringing closure to families.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.B. 217.

I thank the sponsors, Representative Cockley and Representative Ritter, for introducing this bill and thank you for your consideration.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

