**Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police**
**Proponent Testimony – House Bill 852**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 852.

My name is David Haren, and I serve as the Chief of Police for the Heath Police Department. Today, I am testifying on behalf of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police.

Under current Ohio law, there is a technical loophole that allows for the appointment of a "Chief of Police" who is not a certified peace officer. To the average citizen, this sounds impossible. Most Ohioans assume that the individual leading a police department, authorized to oversee use-of-force policies, internal investigations, and the powers of arrest, is, at a minimum, legally qualified to perform the duties of a police officer.

Unfortunately, that is not the reality. We have identified instances across the state, in park districts, hospitals, universities, and some municipalities, where "Chief" roles have been filled by civilian board members or non-certified individuals for extended periods.

When an agency is led by someone who cannot legally answer a call for service, make an arrest, or testify as a sworn officer, it degrades the entire profession in three distinct ways:

1. The title of "Chief" should signify a mastery of the law enforcement craft. Allowing non-certified individuals to hold the title devalues the hard work of every officer who has earned their OPOTA commission and worked to the goal of working their way up to the top.
2. It is inherently difficult for a department to follow a leader who has not stood in their shoes or met the same rigorous state standards required of a rookie patrolman. This disconnect can damage agency culture for years.
3. The public expects their "Chief of Police" to be a true law enforcement professional. Discovering that a Chief is "civilian" in all but title creates a liability for the community and a stain on the transparency we strive for.

HB 852 is a "clean-up" bill that fills a hole in the Ohio Revised Code that few realized existed. Our proposal is straightforward:

- No individual may serve in a permanent capacity as Chief of Police without OPOTA certification.

- We recognize the need for a national talent pool. This bill allows an out-of-state candidate six months to obtain their Ohio credentials. This is more than sufficient; a qualified out-of-state chief typically only needs to pass a written equivalency exam to receive OPOTA credit.
- OACP has consulted directly with the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA), and they fully support this measure. They are aware of the current inconsistencies and agree that this is a necessary step for state-wide standards.

Leadership in law enforcement requires more than administrative skill; it requires the legal authority to stand alongside your officers. HB 852 ensures that the position of Chief of Police remains a role for law enforcement professionals.

We believe this is a common-sense fix that protects the integrity of our badges and the safety of our communities. I urge your favorable report of House Bill 852. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Respectfully,

**David Haren**
**Chief of Police**
**Heath Police Department**