



Proponent Testimony- House Transportation Committee

HB 251—Regards drone use by law enforcement, aviation facilities

June 10, 2025

Chairman Willis, Vice Chair Daniels, Ranking Member Grim, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB251.

My name is Dr. Stuart Mendel, Affiliate Professor at Baldwin Wallace University and Project Director for the Northeast Ohio Flight Information Exchange also known as the NEOFIX.

Many of you are likely familiar with the NEOFIX but quickly it is a system which allows state and local government to publish key information to UAS operators and industry, giving everyone engaged in public, commercial and civilian advanced air mobility a clear, common picture – in the same way charts do for traditional aviation. It is currently being used in Northeast Ohio and we are talking to other communities around the state to roll out similar systems. This type of infrastructure is what will make Ohio a leader in advanced air mobility but also what will make drone use by law enforcement doable and also, most importantly, safe.

House Bill 251, if implemented effectively, can support the safe growth and development of this market in Ohio for both public safety and emergency response uses, and commercial and civilian uses. A key is to emphasize the use of drones in a manner consistent with existing federal, state and local laws for these purposes, while also recognizing drone as a first responder capabilities, which use drones as an extension of dispatch to collect information for emergency purpose, has the potential to both reduce public safety costs and save lives.

Drone as a First Responder is a transformational policing method which has demonstrated the ability to increase officer and community safety, reduce overall police response times, and reduce waste. DFR allows a trained incident commander to “virtually” arrive on scene first before officers are in harm’s way. The Chula Vista Police Department in California — among the early adopters of this technology for police departments using drones — has sent drones to more than 22,000 calls with an average response time from call of 2-4 minutes. By comparison, the traditional average response times using police officers exceeds 20 minutes.

In addition to expedited response time, Drone as a First Responder allows police and fire to better understand an emerging incident, to dispatch appropriate resources and equipment, and to prepare responders for what they will find on the scene. As a method for accomplishing public safety Drone as a First Responder leads to more effective public safety response, reduced waste and cost, and saves the lives of responders and the public through better preparation and de-escalation.

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Questions referred to:

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To illustrate a local use-case, in Northeast Ohio, a man living in apartments above a shopping center was pointing his rifle at passersby from his apartment. This was called into the authorities, and a drone was dispatched. Using the drone the officers were able to communicate with the man, ask him to drop his weapon and exit the building. He complied without danger to others.

Other use cases include tracking of a man who shot an airsoft gun at a security guard in at an outdoor festival. The drone operator was given a description of the person and their vehicle and within minutes the assailant was apprehended. At the same event, law enforcement was able to find an elderly man with memory issues find his family after he had wandered off.

These are just a few use-cases and we are confident there will be many more success stories with expanded DFR use. Especially as public safety is facing tight budgets, DFR allows for better use of office time and, most importantly, assists with keeping our first responders safe.

In Ohio, HB 251 sets the conditions for public safety officials to work within the frame of local ordinances, community use-cases for drone operations and Federal law. It also sets the conditions for a statewide collaboration drawing on input from municipalities, giving their voice, engagement, and participation in governance for their airspace.

We now have substantial experience with this process in Northeast Ohio, including the use of sensors for drone specific operations and engagement, and the partnership, input, and cooperation of local officials. We are also excited to support the UAS Center and the State of Ohio by bringing our expertise to anywhere in the state where it is needed.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity.

I will now take any questions you may have.

Dr. Stuart Mendel
Northeast Ohio Flight Information Exchange