



Tim Schaffer
20th District

Ohio Senate
Senate Building
Room 137, First Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8076
sd20@ohiosenate.gov

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Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee
Senate Bill 321 — Sponsor Testimony
Wednesday, February 11, 2026

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 321.

This legislation will allow special police officers to carry or possess a deadly weapon or firearm while on duty on the premises of an institution under the control of the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (ODBH) or the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (ODODD). More specifically, these special police officers will be allowed to carry these weapons while doing the following:

- Escorting a patient or resident outside of the institution
- Operating a metal detector at the institution
- Patrolling the institution's grounds

Under current law, these special police officers, which are OPOTA certified, do not have the same protections that most other law enforcement officers have today.

Unfortunately, in today's world, officers with a badge are always a target. These officers are particularly at risk due to the nature of transporting or escorting individuals who are not mentally stable and present an increased risk of escape.

This change in law would also give these special police officers the tools that they need to stop a fleeing felon or prevent a potential escape from an individual in custody. Currently, at the direction of the central office, officers are not allowed to pursue a fleeing felon.

With God, all things are possible.

Additionally, this policy puts these special police officers at risk of violating O.R.C. Section 2921.44 Dereliction of Duty, if a state officer fails to prevent or halt the commission of an offense, to apprehend an offender, or allow them to escape.

This much needed change in law will give our special police officers at ODBH and ODODD the protections and tools they need to not only keep themselves safe, but to protect the safety and welfare of the public and other police officers as well.

Thank you once again Chairman Johnson and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.