



FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE OF OHIO, INC.

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Senate Committee on Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Public Safety

Testimony on Senate Bill 321

February 18, 2026

Chairman Johnson, Vice-Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the committee, Senator Craig, Senator Patton, and Senator Schaffer — my name is Steven Laird. I have served as a police officer for over twenty-two years and am currently a Special Police Officer with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 321.

I am here today speaking on behalf of the 23,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio and representing the Special Police Officers appointed under section 5123.13 of the Revised Code.

Senate Bill 321 would enact section 5123.131 of the Revised Code to ensure that Special Police Officers may not be prohibited from carrying a deadly weapon, including a firearm, while on duty when escorting residents into the community or patrolling institutional grounds. These duties present the greatest safety considerations for our officers and the individuals we are sworn to protect.

DODD Special Police Officers are OPOTA-certified peace officers. We complete the same required training as other peace officers in Ohio. The majority of our officers wear police uniforms, some operate marked police vehicles, and are charged with maintaining safety and security on state-operated campuses.

The residents who live in our state-operated facilities, the staff who serve them, and the visitors who enter our campuses all expect a safe and secure environment. Ensuring that safety is one of our core responsibilities as sworn peace officers. The individuals entrusted to our care are among the most vulnerable members of our community. Like children or the elderly, they can be disproportionately victimized and often lack the ability to fully protect themselves. They deserve the same level of protection afforded anywhere else in this state—if not greater—so they may live, receive treatment, and ultimately return to society in a safe and secure environment.

Like every peace officer in Ohio, we took an oath to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Ohio, and to faithfully enforce the laws enacted by this General Assembly. We are expected to respond to criminal conduct, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure public safety. We cannot

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effectively fulfill that oath if we are denied access to the tools necessary to respond to a deadly threat should one arise.

Senate Bill 321 does not expand police authority; it simply removes a blanket prohibition and allows trained, certified peace officers to carry the tools they are already trained to use under Ohio law, while on duty and within defined circumstances.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge this committee to advance Senate Bill 321 and provide DODD Special Police Officers the ability to safely and effectively perform the duties entrusted to us.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to stand and answer any questions.