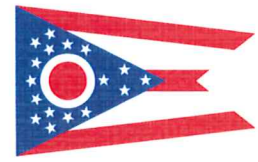




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**Senate Committee on Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Public Safety**

**Testimony on Senate Bill 321**

**February 18, 2026**

Chairman Johnson, Vice-Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the committee — thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 321. My name is Robinson Fester, and I am a police officer with the Department of Behavioral Health - Toledo Campus. I have proudly served in this role for nine years, and I am here speaking on behalf of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio and the police officers of the Department of Behavioral Health.

Senate Bill 321 would ensure that the Director of Behavioral Health cannot prohibit special police officers employed by the agency from carrying a firearm in specific circumstances. Under Ohio administrative code 5122-7-04(F), DBH officers are barred from possessing firearms under any circumstances.

DBH police officers are fully certified OPOTA peace officers who undergo the same rigorous training as every other certified peace officer in the State of Ohio. We wear full police uniforms, operate marked police vehicles, and are entrusted with maintaining safety and security within our facilities. However, despite our certification and responsibilities, officers are limited to carrying only Tasers and batons during on-grounds patrols and are prohibited from carrying these tools off facility grounds, even on a patient transport, leaving officers completely defenseless.

Since the passage of Senate Bill 2 in the 134th General Assembly, DBH hospitals primarily house forensic patients—many of whom committed violent misdemeanors or any felony-level offenses prior to admission. Officers are expected to escort these individuals off facility grounds without any forms of protection, despite the fact that many of these same individuals were originally transported to and from our facilities under armed escort. Many transport details are often into high-crime areas with little to no immediate backup.

Current agency policies rely heavily on calling local law enforcement or the highway patrol to respond to serious incidents where any risk of harm may occur. This approach diverts outside officers from their own communities and responsibilities, rather than allowing trained DBH peace officers to address situations within their jurisdiction. In dangerous situations where seconds matter, having an armed officer on site, rather than waiting around for an armed officer to arrive, can make the difference of lives saved over lives lost.

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Chairman Terry Johnson

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Senate Bill 321 would provide DBH officers with the tools necessary to effectively protect themselves, staff, patients, and the public. It would allow trained law enforcement professionals to carry out the duties they are already certified to perform, strengthening safety while reducing reliance on external agencies.

For these reasons, the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio and the Department of Behavioral Health's police officers respectfully ask the committee to give favorable consideration to Senate Bill 321. Thank you for your time and your attention.