

74th House District

Clark County

rep74@ohiohouse.gov

(614) 466-2038

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center

77 S. High Street

13th Floor

Columbus, Ohio 43215



Committees

Chair: Transportation

Finance

Public Safety

Veterans and Military
Development

Bernie “Bunyan” Willis
State Representative

S.H.B. 251 Sponsor Testimony

Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee

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 speak on Sub House Bill 251, which updates Ohio law to address the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by law enforcement. This legislation also modernizes our state's aviation definitions to better align with the expanding field of advanced air mobility.

My name is Logan Hannum, and I serve as the legislative aide to Representative Bernie Willis. Unfortunately, Representative Willis is unable to attend today's committee hearing, so I will be providing sponsor testimony on his behalf.

As technology advances, our laws must keep pace to protect both public safety and constitutional rights. The Fourth Amendment protects all citizens from unreasonable searches and seizures, and that principle doesn't disappear simply because technology changes.

While officers don't need a warrant to view what's visible from a manned aircraft, drones have changed the equation. They can hover lower, stay longer, and collect far more detailed data than ever before. That's why H.B. 251 establishes a clear warrant requirement. If law enforcement would need a warrant to enter or observe a property in person, they must also obtain a warrant to observe it with a drone.

Evidence gathered without a warrant, when one is required, cannot be used in court. This safeguard ensures the integrity of our justice system and reinforces the rule of law.

However, the bill also recognizes that flexibility is sometimes necessary. UAVs can save lives and improve safety when used responsibly. The legislation outlines specific exceptions where warrantless drone use is permitted, such as during natural or weather-related disasters, for traffic accident investigations, in exigent circumstances, or for research, education, and training purposes.

Some additions were added that provide an important clarification, allowing UAVs to operate in navigable airspace in a physically non-intrusive manner to observe what is already visible to the

naked eye. This mirrors long-standing aviation precedent and gives law enforcement clear guidance when operating responsibly in public airspace.

To maintain transparency and accountability, the bill requires agencies to document every UAV flight and, under this amendment, to record both flight and surveillance data. These records must be retained, verified, and made available as public records, unless an existing exemption applies.

The bill also makes it clear that UAVs cannot be armed, and that law enforcement cannot authorize private-to-private surveillance without consent. These provisions keep Ohio focused on safety, not overreach.

Beyond UAV policy, House Bill 251 strengthens Ohio's leadership in aviation by updating our definitions in law. It formally recognizes heliports, vertiports, seaplane bases, and spaceports—facilities that will define the next era of flight. This aligns our statutes with today's industry standards and supports continued growth in Ohio's aviation and aerospace economy, from Dayton and Springfield to the spaceport developments now emerging across our state.

The bill also includes technical updates from H.B. 77 of the 135th General Assembly, ensuring our aviation code remains accurate and consistent across Ohio law.

Additionally, there is a substitute bill coming soon which will include important safeguards regarding the use and procurement of unmanned aerial vehicle systems manufactured by foreign adversaries. By restricting the purchase and operation of foreign-made drones by public entities, this legislation strengthens Ohio's commitment to protecting sensitive data, critical infrastructure, and national security interests. These provisions ensure that as we expand our use of UAV technology, we do so in a way that prioritizes both innovation and security

This legislation reflects thoughtful, bipartisan collaboration. It balances innovation, privacy, and accountability, ensuring Ohio remains both a national model for UAV policy and a global leader in aerospace development.

Ohio is not just the birthplace of aviation, but the HOME of aviation. H.B. 251 honors that legacy by ensuring that as flight technology evolves, Ohio continues to lead with foresight, integrity, and responsibility.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.