

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 318.

I want to voice my support for the proposed bill to authorize township law enforcement agencies to provide school resource officer services to a chartered nonpublic school. As the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Youngstown, I believe this proposal serves several vital interests for our schools and corrects an oversight in the Ohio Revised Code.

Many schools throughout Ohio are contracting with local police departments to provide security for their students, staff, and campus. Given the crises faced at so many schools throughout the country, we should be doing everything possible to increase access to resource officers for schools in our communities.

I believe the proposed bill serves the interests of both the schools impacted and the townships. Consider the case of **Holy Family Catholic School in Poland Township** near Youngstown. This growing school serves 295 Kindergarten through 8th grade students and their families. These children are just as deserving of protection as students in other municipalities so *increasing access* to police protection through the hiring of a school resource officer, which is what this bill does, is certainly in their best interest. Additionally, it's a benefit to the township because it puts more police presence in the community while getting part of the costs covered by the school. This is a win-win situation.

The presence of School Resource Officers is a strong deterrent to targeting a specific school, and just as importantly a trained, authoritative voice is extremely helpful in an emergency. Teachers are thoroughly trained in crisis response and many educational professionals have acted heroically in tragic circumstances, but there is no substitute for a police presence in an emergency. Expanding access to school resource officers is an easy and visible endorsement not only of confidence in the police force itself but in the teaching profession as well.

Schools are investing significant funds in security, much of it in new and more sophisticated technology. Cameras, visitor management systems, and updated security plans are important factors in making our schools safer, but school resource officers, especially from local law enforcement agencies, play a role that no piece of technology can imitate. **Resource officers build trust** in their communities, and they serve as positive role models for students. I have seen this first-hand in one of my previous posts and there is no substitute for their presence with the students. That is why local law enforcement is the best option for schools. These men and women know the challenges in their own communities and are likely to see students outside the school as well. This is a significant, if somewhat intangible, benefit to allowing township police officers fill this role.

The limitations in the current Ohio Revised Code are more definitional than substantive. There is no real reason not to have township police invest in their communities in this way, and the benefits to doing so are significant. I urge all Ohio legislators to support Senator Cutrona's bill

and to demonstrate their commitment to the safety and development of our students, teachers, and communities.

Thank you again, Chairman Brenner and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 318. I believe this is a great step forward in protecting the children in our communities.