

Testimony of Joe Everetts
President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association
Deputy Registrar of the Montgomery and Mason, Ohio BMV Offices
Before the Senate Finance Committee, June 5, 2025
In Support of Operating Budget Proposed Amendment No.
SC0468: BMV Service Fees

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee. I'm Joe Everetts, President of the Ohio Deputy Registrars Association and a Deputy Registrar serving Mason and Montgomery. Thank you for allowing me to address you on a critical issue affecting every Ohioan who relies on our Bureau of Motor Vehicles—a system at a tipping point.

Let me explain how Ohio's BMV works. Our 185 local offices are not state-run but operated by small businesses called Deputy Registrars. Since 1990, we've issued licenses, IDs, and registrations, registered voters, and supported programs like the Second Chance Trust Fund. Last year, we handled 15 million transactions with 98% satisfaction and 12-minute wait times—far better than the national 44-minute average.

This matters because our privatized model saves taxpayers hundreds of millions annually while keeping customer satisfaction high and transaction costs low. The BMV estimates a state-run system would cost \$218 million a year. We're small businesses delivering big savings, keeping costs low. Registering a 2024 Chevy Blazer in Ohio costs \$36 to \$66, compared to \$416 in Indiana or \$300 in Kentucky. Our system is a bargain—but it's breaking.

The revenue we earn to cover our costs of doing business is a fee set by statute. Our \$5.00 fee, unchanged since 2019, is crumbling under rising costs. Inflation has eroded its value by 20%, and wages—our largest expense—have soared. Ohio's minimum wage has jumped 25%, and we're losing skilled staff to banks, retail, even the BMV itself. If the state ran our offices, a Customer Service Assistant would earn over \$26.00 per hour plus benefits—health, dental, paid leave—totaling \$38 hourly. Most of our employees start at \$13 with virtually no benefits. This massive pay gap makes it impossible to retain the talent needed to master 1,500 pages of BMV procedures and safeguard sensitive data.

Some may propose moving all BMV services online to cut costs and close offices, but that overlooks critical realities. Many transactions — such as document authentication for

REAL IDs, eye tests for licenses, and VIN inspections – must be done in person for legal and security reasons. We fully support online options for simpler tasks like renewals; they're convenient for Ohioans, and we embrace that progress. However, our fixed costs—rent, utilities, payroll—don't shrink when transactions move online and we must have physical offices for those critical transactions that cannot go online.

What we do in our offices impacts Ohioans' ability to vote, get on a plane, enter many local, state, and federal buildings, apply for credit, find employment, drive your vehicle, and apply for state and federal programs.

We're Ohio's first line against identity fraud. In the past 12 months, my office caught two individuals, living in our country illegally, stealing Puerto Rican identities—one tried to register to vote. Our staff's vigilance led to arrests and felony charges. We stop fraud daily, protecting your constituents' identities and trust. That's a responsibility we take seriously.

Without a fee increase, this system is unraveling. Offices are closing —Toledo's Madison Avenue is gone, Gahanna faced a recent extended closure, Woodsfield may be next. Closures mean longer drives and waits, especially for the elderly. We're asking for a \$10 fee—a user fee, not a tax, costing \$1.25 yearly for a license. This will close the wage gap, keep skilled staff, and help fund technology to streamline service. It's an investment in better service and security.

Picture rural Ohioans driving an hour for a license or veterans struggling for free IDs we provide. This is happening now and will only get worse. This amendment ensures fast, secure, affordable service, not a state-run system costing millions more.

I urge you to support this amendment. You can protect a system that saves money, secures identities, and serves millions. A \$5 increase—not even pennies a day—will keep our doors open and communities strong. Your constituents are relying on your leadership in this matter. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer questions.