

KJ Watts, Assistant Chief  
City of Whitehall, Division of Fire  
HB 96 Proponent Testimony  
In Support of eTMS Funding  
May 13, 2025

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Ohio's eTMS program. My name is KJ Watts, and I've served in the fire service for 28 years. Throughout those years, I've responded to some of the most intense and traumatic events a human being can witness—situations that don't just fade away when the sirens go silent.

I struggled for years with chronic sleep deprivation, nightmares, and what I later came to understand as complex PTSD. I wasn't just tired, I was exhausted to the core, living in a constant state of hypervigilance, always on edge. It wore on me, my leadership, and most painfully, my family. I have four children, now adults, who grew up watching their dad come home after shift after shift, never truly rested or present.

I pursued every traditional treatment available to me: talk therapy, EMDR, medications for depression and sleep. Some offered moments of clarity or rest, but nothing gave me sustained relief or they came with unmanageable side effects.

That changed after just 5 or 6 days of receiving eTMS. For the first time in decades, I began to sleep, deep and restful sleep. My wife told me one morning that in our 15 years together, she had never heard me sleep that soundly and that deeply. I was relaxed, less irritable, and the constant mental noise started to quiet. My PTSD triggers became more manageable. I was functioning at a different pace, not the breakneck, hypervigilant speed I'd lived at for years, but one rooted in stability.

And it wasn't just sleep. My clarity improved. My leadership became more focused. I was better equipped to handle personnel issues, to manage budgets, and to support my team. And perhaps most importantly, my children noticed the difference. They've told me they see it in my tone, my engagement, my ability to listen and be present. I missed a lot, and while I can't get those years back, I'm showing up differently now.

It's been a year and a half since I received eTMS and I still feel good. And I still talk to others about it, encouraging them to try it. And the responses? They're calling me. Thanking me, telling me it changed their lives too.

In Ohio alone, we have over 11,000 full-time paid firefighters and another 40,000 to 50,000 volunteers. That's tens of thousands of men and women answering the call, day and night,

witnessing trauma that piles up over years. The community expects calm, composed professionals at every call, and we strive to deliver that. But we are human, too. We carry the weight of those emergencies long after the scene is cleared.

This treatment gave me my life back. And I know it can help many more, if we have the courage and commitment to ensure access. Give us the tools to stay in this job. To stay healthy. To go home at the end of the day and actually rest. Please, please continue to support eTMS so other firefighters can improve their lives too.

Thank you, I am happy to answer questions.