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State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Repeat Offender Act.

Cities across Ohio have long been plagued by violent crime, from armed robberies to drive-by shootings. My home city of Toledo is no different. In 2023, there were over 200 shootings. Just a few years ago, a 7-month old child was killed in a drive-by shooting. Yet, these are not just random acts. In fact, the majority of gun crime is committed by a handful of repeat offenders who are not allowed to possess a firearm.

With this legislation, we will continue to fight for the Second Amendment right of citizens to keep and bear arms, while simultaneously removing guns from the hands of violent felons. This bill will get those offenders off of the street by increasing penalties and requiring mandatory prison time for repeat offenders.

Without changing any gun laws that would affect law-abiding gun owners, this bill increases the penalties for possession of a gun while “under disability” for violent felons and creates a new firearm specification for repeatedly being in possession of an illegal firearm.

Currently in Ohio, the penalty for a “weapon under disability” violation is a felony of the third degree (F3). This bill will raise repeated offenses by violent felons to a second-

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degree felony (F2). Additionally, those offenders who have been previously convicted of a weapons under disability violation who are violent felons will be eligible for a new five-year weapons specification in addition to a potential eight year sentence for the underlying felony of the second degree (F2).

Research conducted by the United States Sentencing Commission supports the strategy of increasing penalties when it comes to repeat violent offenders. The study concluded that sentences 60 months or longer had a significantly greater deterrent effect than shorter sentences, resulting in a 17% decrease in recidivism.¹ A comprehensive study of the deterrent effects of gun specifications conducted by the University of Pennsylvania confirmed that gun specifications had a similar deterrent effect on gun crimes.²

With support from Governor Mike DeWine, Attorney General Dave Yost, and the Ohio Mayors Alliance, it is evident that this legislation presents a bipartisan solution to a problem that affects all Ohioans. This legislation will give our cities and towns the tools necessary to keep their communities safe and combat the epidemic of violent crime in our state. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify as a sponsor of this legislation, and I welcome any questions you may have.