Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 295

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Robert Butler the President of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) and I am writing to offer our strong support for Senate Bill 295.

This legislation is essential for safeguarding our communities and ensuring that justice is not merely sought, but fully achieved, in the most heinous criminal cases. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners in the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA) in recognizing that this bill closes a critical loophole in Ohio law that has allowed violent offenders to exploit the system.

The fundamental breakdown in our current process is clear. Ohio law sets an inadequate, blanket one-year timeframe for restoring a criminal defendant to competency, even when that defendant is charged with the most severe crimes, such as murder or aggravated murder. This timeline has inadvertently created an incentive for violent offenders to thwart justice. The tragic case of Cleveland Police Officer Jamieson Ritter and the murder of Beatrice Porter in Cuyahoga County serves as the clearest evidence that the current system is broken. The defendant, Delawnte Hardy, was found incompetent to stand trial, yet was reportedly able to actively impede his own treatment for months. Under the existing one-year limit, this refusal could have allowed him to "run out the clock," forcing the dismissal of murder charges and leaving the victims' families, and our police force, with no accountability. The OACP asserts that our state cannot allow violent offenders to exploit a procedural timeline to avoid trial for the taking of human life.

Senate Bill 295 provides three crucial mechanisms to restore public faith in the competency process and guarantee justice for victims. First, for offenses as severe as murder, the bill wisely extends the restoration period from one year to five years. This necessary increase ensures that our mental health facilities and courts have the required time to treat and stabilize defendants so they may ultimately face the charges brought against them. Our police officers spend countless hours building cases; that effort should not be rendered meaningless by an arbitrary time constraint.

Second, the bill implements the most critical fix by allowing the competency timeline to be paused when a defendant refuses treatment or medication. This provision eliminates the incentive to intentionally stall the process, guaranteeing that the restoration period is used for genuine treatment, not for strategic manipulation of the justice system.

Finally, the bill enhances transparency by requiring treating facilities to notify the court within 14 days of treatment refusal. This is a clear victory for judicial oversight, ensuring that

prosecutors and judges are immediately informed and can act promptly to pause the clock and prevent violent criminals from disappearing into the system while their timeline expires.

The OACP strongly believes that Senate Bill 295 is a responsible, necessary legislative measure that protects the integrity of our courts, ends the procedural abuse by violent criminals, and ensures that all police officers who risk their lives to secure justice can trust that the judicial system will hold these offenders accountable. We urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to pass Senate Bill 295. Thank you.