Testimony of Jon and Karen Ritter – Senate Bill 295

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, and esteemed Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the broken families and shattered communities that Senate Bill 295 can finally begin to heal.

We also would like to express our deepest gratitude to Chairman Manning and Senator Patton for their sponsoring of Senate Bill 295. This very important revision to legislation will prevent and alleviate families like our family, Beatrice Porter's family and all crime victims in Ohio from enduring the emotional trauma of a timeline.

We are Jon and Karen Ritter, parents of Cleveland Police Officer Jamieson Ritter, who was murdered in the line of duty on July 4, 2024, while protecting the community. Our son was responding to a call involving De'Lawnte Hardy who was barricaded in a home after he had just murdered his own grandmother, Beatrice Porter, days earlier. Jamieson and other officers on the scene were dispatched to apprehend Hardy. During a standoff, Hardy emerged from the home with multiple weapons, including a handgun and during the attempted arrest Hardy began shooting at the officers. Tragically, one of the bullets killed our son, when Hardy fired at point-blank range, killing Jamieson at the young age of 27.

Since that day, our family has lived in a daily nightmare with periods of prolonged disbelief and grief. There are days when it is difficult to get out of bed, function in a normal society, and continue our important role as parents and grandparents for our family.

Hardy was originally held in the Cuyahoga County Jail and then transferred to Central Ohio Behavioral Health (formerly known as Twin Valley Behavioral Health) after he was deemed incompetent at the time to stand trial. Since Hardy was transferred and confined at Central Ohio Behavioral Health, what followed was not a path to justice for the only pending murder case of an officer killed in the line of duty in the State of Ohio, but rather a descent into a series of events that include systemic failures by the staff and medical professionals at Central Ohio Behavioral Health. Clearly, deliberate failures to notify the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office and Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court of Hardy's refusal to take ordered medication to restore him to competency to stand trial, this is, at a minimum, bureaucratic incompetency.

After Hardy arrived at COBH, he refused his medications that typically restore a mentally ill patient to competency to stand trial within a few months. The Court, the Prosecutors and our family learned during the March 2025 hearing - five months too late – that Hardy was not taking any medication, as ordered by the Court. During that five-month period, no one notified the Court. No physician alerted the prosecutor's office. No bloodwork was taken to demonstrate compliance or lack of compliance. In fact, there was no communication

whatsoever. This wasn't just a breakdown in communication—it was a lack of accountability and responsibility. These actions allowed a violent offender to manipulate the system, delaying justice while our family continues to endure unbearable loss, heartache and grief.

The current law gives the state just one year to restore competency. However, when that year is squandered by noncompliance and conspiratorial silence, families like ours are left with no recourse. Hardy's restoration period ends in March 2026. Without reform, he could be left untreated, untried, and not held accountable.

What we can assure this committee and the citizens of this state is that our family will not rest until De'Lawnte Hardy faces justice for the murder of our son who, as a police officer was acting in the line of duty to save lives of the citizens of Ohio and his fellow officers.

Senate Bill 295 proposes critical reforms to Ohio's competency restoration laws. It extends the restoration period from one year to up to five years for violent felony cases, requires facilities to report medication refusals within 14 days, and mandates structured progress reports. These changes will help courts manage high-risk defendants more effectively and prevent manipulation of the system. It will close the loopholes that allow dangerous individuals to stall justice and reenter our communities without consequence.

These statistics underscore a systemic crisis. The lack of timely restoration and oversight not only delays justice but also places communities at risk. Law enforcement officers, mental health professionals and families alike are impacted when dangerous individuals are released without proper treatment or accountability.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to the Ohio Criminal Justice Data Snapshot January 2025, the Ohio MHAS Regional Psychiatric Hospital Data – FY 2023 and Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Recidivism Report – 2021 - ninety-three percent of Ohio's psychiatric beds are filled with court-ordered forensic patients - leaving no room for those in crisis who haven't committed a crime.

One in three inmates in our jails suffers from mental illness, and many are stuck waiting for competency restoration that may never come. Nearly one in three Ohioans released from prison are rearrested within three years. Among forensic psychiatric patients, over 1 in 5 reoffend violently - even while under outpatient treatment. These aren't just statistics - they're red flags and warning signs. And Jamieson's tragic murder confirms those statistics.

This bill won't bring back our son, Jamieson. But this legislation can hold Hardy accountable for his actions, and it will protect other families and victims. And it will

ensure that no victim, parent or family member waits in torment while this broken system fails to deliver the justice that we are all required to ensure is preserved.

On behalf of our son, Officer Jamieson Ritter and all Ohioans, we urge this committee to act swiftly and decisively. The time for reform is now. Let Ohio lead the way in protecting its citizens and restoring faith in our justice and mental health systems.

We implore you to Pass Senate Bill 295. For Jamieson. For Beatrice. For every Ohio family who deserves better.

Thank you.

References Ohio Criminal Justice Data Snapshot – January 2025. Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

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