BEFORE THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 295

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 295. My name is Andrew J. Gasiewski, and I am President of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association.

I have been a member of the Cleveland Division of Police since 1995 and have had the honor of serving as the President of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association (CPPA) since 2022. The CPPA was founded in 1968 and is the sole collective bargaining unit for the patrol officers of the Cleveland Division of Police. We currently represent more than 1,200 active and retired law enforcement officers.

The CPPA supports Senate Bill 295 because it makes needed reforms to protect the integrity of our justice system, especially in cases involving violent crime. This bill directly addresses a critical flaw in current law that defendant Delawnte Hardy, the man charged with the murder of our very own Cleveland Police Officer Jamieson Ritter, tragically exploited.

Under existing law, a defendant in a murder case has a one year limit for competency restoration. This inadequate timeline creates a clear incentive for violent offenders to abuse the system. They simply refuse treatment and actively attempt to "run out the clock" until the court dismisses their case. Mr. Hardy reportedly employed this exact tactic, which delayed his restoration to competency for months.

Senate Bill 295 addresses this issue by extending the competency restoration timeline to five years for the most egregious offenses, such as the aggravated murder of a police officer. It also mandates the competency clock tolls for any period of time a defendant refuses medication or medical treatment. These changes will prove beneficial because they reduce the incentive for offenders to refuse competency treatment and give medical professionals the necessary time to properly treat and stabilize defendants so they can stand trial.

The legislation also enhances judicial oversight by requiring treatment facilities to notify the court within 14 days whenever a patient refuses to cooperate. This mandatory reporting procedure helps inform the court, prosecutors, and victims about an offender who is seeking to prevent their competency by refusing medical treatment. That notification will ensure courts can act promptly to toll the offender’s competency clock and help hold them accountable.

In closing, the CPPA urge this committee to pass Senate Bill 295 to honor the memory of Officer Jamieson Ritter and close a loophole in Ohio law that allows offenders to escape justice.