Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
House Bill 20 – Proponent Testimony
Senate Judiciary Committee

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on behalf of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) regarding House Bill 20. My name is Robert Butler; I serve as the Chief of Police for the City of Independence and as the President of the OACP.

In our profession, seconds and minutes can mean life or death. Whether we are performing life-saving measures at a crash site or taking a violent suspect into custody, a first responder's focus must be entirely on the task at hand. House Bill 20 provides a necessary, objective tool to ensure that focus remains where it belongs.

Currently, "obstructing official business" has been seen by some courts as a subjective and vague charge, often leading to evidentiary challenges in court. HB 20 clarifies this by empowering first responders to give a clear, verbal warning to individuals whose proximity has become a distraction or a danger. If a person refuses to maintain a safe distance after being warned, their intent is no longer to observe; it is to interfere.

I want to be clear: the OACP and its members fully support the First Amendment right of the public to record and observe police activity. Transparency is a cornerstone of modern policing. However, that right does not include the right to physically crowd a scene, distract an officer during a high-tension encounter, or create a "tactical blind spot" that puts the officer or the public at risk.

This bill isn't about stopping people from watching us; it's about giving us the space to save lives and do our jobs. It provides a clear standard that first responders can articulate to the public on-scene and to the courts afterward.

On behalf of the over 800 law enforcement executives of the OACP, I urge your favorable passage of House Bill 20.