Northern Ohio Fire Fighters Association

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www.NOFF.org

March 24, 2026

Proponent Testimony: HB 20 (Hall, Plummer) –Prohibit harassing or impeding an emergency service responder

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 20.

The Northern Ohio Fire Fighters (NOFF) is made up of 20 local fire departments representing active and retired firefighters in five different counties including (Cuyahoga, Lake, Summit, Geauga, and Medina Counties.) Our organization has a history of service and knows the importance of working to move this State forward as members have served on the State Fire Commission, statewide task forces, and the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Board. We have been involved in regionalization projects, fire life safety programs with fire dampers, and pension reform. Giving and being active in the community is also very important to NOFF, the organization and its members have raised considerable funding for various charities over the years.

HB 20 modifies the current offense of obstructing official business by increasing the penalty for the offense from a second degree misdemeanor to a first degree misdemeanor if the following circumstances are met: (1) if the victim is an emergency service responder engaged in the lawful performance of the responder's legal duties, (2) if the responder issued a command ordering a person to maintain the person's distance, to stay away, to back away, to not interfere, or another similar instruction and the verbal command was communicated in such a manner that a reasonable person would believe they must comply service responder engaged in the lawful performance of the responder's legal duties.

Our job as first responders is packed with crucial split-second decisions and analysis of situations. Having a clearer distance to do our job effectively and efficiently is something that will only help those that receive care, those providing care, and likely the final outcome of the situations we are called to serve in. We agree that this legislation can serve as an opportunity to de-escalate a situation. It can pre-emptively help situations from becoming much more chaotic. The ability to get everyone home safely - those we treat, other first responders on the scene, and ourselves and our team is key. We feel this legislation provides another opportunity to do just that.

Sam Gmetro
President Northern Ohio Fire Fighters