

Chairman Patton, Vice Chair Schaeffer, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. Thank you for your time, and the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Ben Ziff, I am the Mobility Coordinator at Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, a non-profit organization committed to empowering individuals and promoting self-sufficiency. In line with this mission, HAPCAP operates public transportation systems in Athens and Hocking Counties and provides statewide intercity bus service connecting many of Ohio's rural communities to its urban centers. I am here today for several reasons: to speak about the importance of public transportation in rural Ohio, to urge the Senate Transportation Committee to continue to support public transit, and to discourage the requirement of law enforcement in transit hubs.

Appalachian Ohio, while beautiful and peaceful, faces significant challenges. Ranging from poverty, to healthcare access, to a lack of job availability, to food deserts, to accessible, affordable childcare, our wonderful region is plagued by issues that have a common link: transportation. I work in one of the poorest counties in Ohio, Athens County, with a poverty rate of 24.4%. Every day, every single day, I see firsthand these issues that so many of our citizens struggle to overcome. My job affords me the opportunity to help the people who so desperately need to access these resources.

It is sometimes easy to forget how different our lives are, from the lives of the people we serve. I have a relatively stable job, a reliable income, and a roof over my head that I am not at risk of losing any time soon. I think the same could be said for most of us in this room. Many of us here today are fortunate enough to have access to our own private modes of transportation, cars. But so many of the people we serve, do not have that luxury. They depend on services provided by our organization, HAPCAP, and by you, the legislators who provide assistance to all Ohioans through the programs you fund, and the actions you undertake.

Transportation is an essential part of everyone's life. Whether it is travelling to work, a life-saving medical appointment like dialysis, the grocery store, or being able to visit friends and loved ones, transportation is one of the most fundamental aspects of our daily existence. Without reliable transportation, many people struggle to find work, to receive the medical care they so desperately need, to spend an evening with their family in the next town over. Through the funding you approve for public transit, we are able to provide these opportunities to people. Down in Hocking County, HAPCAP runs Logan Public Transit, a curb-to-curb transportation service that lets people accomplish all of the aforementioned activities and goals, at a price they can afford. In Athens County, Athens on Demand Transit provides a

similar service, and Athens Public Transit provides a fixed bus route that the City and surrounding villages and townships are able to rely on for affordable, safe transportation.

But what we do now, unfortunately, is not enough. Athens on Demand Transit is regularly booked nearly 2 weeks in advance. If people need to get somewhere today, it is unlikely we will be able to provide them with that trip. Athens Public Transit has had to suspend some service lines due to budget constraints, which is a fancy way of saying “they desperately need more funding to provide the level of service the citizenry deserves.” Through an increase in the existing transportation budget, many transportation providers like us, all around the state, would be able to provide more of those trips. Our rural transportation services here in the beautiful State of Ohio are often stretched to the breaking point. The decisions that you make here could potentially allow us to expand the service we currently provide, and improve the quality of life for all citizens here in Ohio.

As I have mentioned, funding is a paramount issue for not just my organization, but for many transportation providers around the state. We, down in Athens County, are fortunate to have the fixed route bus service we have. Athens Public Transit has 7 bus lines, and a location that we use as a hub for these lines to connect to each other, allowing for riders to travel all around our county, conveniently and safely. Unfortunately, with the added requirements to this current legislation, we would fall into the category required to pay for law enforcement at this hub. I want to very briefly paint you a picture of what our “hub” truly is. It is a sidewalk, with one 12’ bus shelter, a trash can, and a bench. With our funds already stretched paper-thin, meeting this law enforcement requirement will further hamper our ability to provide the level of service people in our region expect, and deserve. The financial burden of this amended requirement, would most likely force us to close one of our bus lines. In my mind, a nearly 15% decrease in service far outweighs the need for law enforcement at a location where we have zero reported instances of violence, or other criminal acts.

I want to stress that whatever this body decides, we will do our best to meet compliance. HAPCAP Transportation has an outstanding track record of meeting all ODOT and FTA regulations, and we intend to continue this, whether this legislation passes in its current form or not.

Thank you very much for your time, I and my colleagues all appreciate the work you do every single day to make Ohio better. Thank you.