



WOOSTER TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Testimony in Opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 180

Submitted to the Ohio Senate Transportation Committee

Submitting Official: Scott Wolfe

Title: Drone Team Coordinator

Agency: Wooster Township Fire Department

Date: October 27, 2025

I. Introduction

Chairman Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Senate Bill 180 (SB 180), which proposes prohibiting the purchase and operation of small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS, colloquially referred to as drones) manufactured or assembled by entities designated as foreign adversaries by May 1, 2027.

My name is Scott Wolfe, and I serve as Drone Team Coordinator for the Wooster Township Fire Department. Our drones are used for search and rescue, structure fires, disaster response, and scene safety throughout Wayne County - protecting both our responders and the public.

SB 180, as currently written, seeks to prohibit the use of Chinese manufactured drones in the interest of national security. I fully recognize and respect the intent behind this effort and the concerns that have prompted it. However, in practical terms, the Federal Aviation Administration, the agency with regulatory authority over drone operations, does not have the personnel or infrastructure necessary to effectively enforce such a measure.

The reality is that most private owners of Chinese manufactured drones are unlikely to voluntarily dispose of or discontinue their use. Without a clear enforcement mechanism, compliance will fall almost exclusively on public agencies that are bound by law to adhere to federal and state mandates. Consequently, the very organizations we rely upon to protect and serve our communities such as fire departments, law enforcement, and emergency management agencies would be the only entities forced to forfeit these valuable tools and technologies.

In effect, this legislation would restrict access for those tasked with safeguarding the public while leaving private hobbyists and commercial users largely unaffected. The situation could be likened to a policy removing firearms from law enforcement officers while allowing the general public to retain their firearms.

SB 180, as written, would unintentionally cripple Ohio's public safety drone programs and waste millions in taxpayer-funded equipment and training investments.



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II. Impact on Public Safety Agencies

Nearly every public safety drone program in Ohio relies on aircraft manufactured by companies that would fall under this ban. These systems are the standard for reliability, safety, and affordability.

If SB 180 takes effect as written, the operational ban would:

- Ground more than 90% of active public safety drones statewide.
- Invalidate thousands of training hours and certifications specific to these aircraft.
- Impose unfunded replacement costs ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per department.
- Force departments to abandon existing software, batteries, and sensors, creating massive waste and operational setbacks.

Smaller and rural departments - such as Wooster Township - would be hit hardest. Many would be forced to suspend drone operations entirely, losing the vital capabilities relied upon for searches, hazardous material incidents, and disaster response.

III. Financial and Operational Realities

There is currently no state or federal funding mechanism to replace the equipment this bill would outlaw. Even if funding were made available, U.S. manufactured alternatives cost three to five times more and often lack the reliability or advanced software ecosystems that public safety agencies depend on.

Replacing functional, field-proven drones with less capable, costlier alternatives is not a realistic or responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Ohio's public safety drone programs represent years of investment in training, equipment, and operational expertise—an investment that SB 180 would effectively erase overnight.

IV. Safety and Service Consequences

Drones have become essential to modern emergency response. They have saved lives by:

- Locating missing persons in minutes, not hours.
- Providing real-time situational awareness during fires, rescues, and disasters.
- Conducting damage assessments while keeping firefighters and rescuers out of danger.

Removing these tools without viable, funded replacements will directly delay responses, reduce safety, and cost lives.



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V. Recommendations

I strongly urge the committee to amend SB 180 to protect both security and public safety. Specifically:

1. Eliminate the operational ban (Section B-3). Allow continued use of existing aircraft until secure, affordable replacements are available.
2. Establish a funding program to assist with future fleet transitions.
3. Allow continued operation under safeguards, such as restricted network access and certified cybersecurity practices.
4. Create a statewide public safety UAS working group to evaluate realistic implementation strategies.

VI. Conclusion

Ohio's fire, law enforcement, and emergency management agencies have invested heavily in drone programs that save lives every day. Without funding, realistic timelines, or practical alternatives, SB 180 would dismantle those programs and compromise public safety statewide.

I respectfully urge the committee to oppose SB 180 as written or amend it to ensure any transition is achievable, affordable, and does not undermine the ability of Ohio's first responders to protect our citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,
Scott Wolfe
Drone Team Coordinator
Wooster Township Fire