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OPPOSITION TESTIMONY

on

H. B. No. 104

by

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am John Gilchrist and I am here to express the opposition that the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police has to H. B. 104. As you know, the bill would provide that the failure to display a front license plate is a secondary offense with a maximum fine of \$25 for a violation. In fact, the Association is opposed to any legislation that would eliminate the front license plate. This opposition extends to H. B. No. 159 and the provision in the state budget bill (H. B. No.64) as well. H. B. No. 159 would require that vehicle carry only one license plate. The provision in the H. B. No 64 (Section 4503.181) would provide for the elimination of the front license plate on historical vehicles.

By making failure to have a front license plate a secondary offense, the officer cannot stop the offender unless the individual has committed another offense. Lowering the fine and making it a secondary offense will encourage people not to attach the front license plate. In addition, This gives the message that the front license plate is not considered as necessary as a public safety measure or a tool useful to law enforcement.

This is contrary to the finding recently issued by the License Plate Safety Task Force created by H. B. No. 59 of the 130th General Assembly. The committee had the task of examining whether having dual license plates is beneficial to law enforcement and to also determine whether the state should continue its dual license plate requirement. After three hearings the Task Force recommended that Ohio should maintain the current law of requiring two license plates because they are a useful tool for law enforcement.

It is of interest to note that no individuals or groups appeared to testify in support of one license plate. All witnesses providing testimony urged Ohio to maintain two license plates. In addition, pursuant to the Task Force's final report, 31 states currently have two license plates. Also, two states (Connecticut and Massachusetts) have recently returned to using two license plates and Michigan had introduced a bill in late October 2013 to require dual license plates.

The front license plate is a critical law enforcement tool used in a variety of situations—from auto theft investigations, DUI enforcement, hit/skip crashes, to bank robbery and even homicide investigations. When investigating these various situations, law enforcement officers rely upon

eyewitness accounts and physical evidence to track down drivers who damage property, commit various criminal offenses, or injure or kill other motorists. Again, in all of these various situations, the front license plate is sometimes the only lead an officer possesses.

The front license plate is also valuable to law enforcement when captured by video surveillance at convenience stores and gas stations where crimes like robberies occur. In fact, the Association believes that the front license plate and the existence of these surveillance cameras serve as a deterrent. The front license plate is also of value when License Plate Readers are used—they often assist in solving crimes that would otherwise have become cold cases.

State law requires school bus drivers to report violations of motorists passing a stopped school bus to law enforcement. Removing the front license plate will be a step backward with regard to being able to identify both the driver and the vehicle when a motorist violated a stopped school bus. It should be noted that many school buses are equipped with cameras.

Neighborhood block watch groups and uniformed police volunteer programs often rely upon both front and rear license plates to report suspicious vehicles or activities. Also, many government entities and private businesses have photo cameras in parking lot, in front of their businesses, and other locations. These cameras often capture the license plates of criminals.

In short, there is value in seeing a vehicle's plates both coming and going.

It should also be noted that Section 755.40 enacted in the Transportation Budget bill (H. B. No. 53) creates the joint Legislative Task Force on Department of Transportation issues. One of the issues to be studied deals with requiring a front license plate and methods for saving money on license plates. The Task Force shall consist of three members of the House Finance Committee and three members of the Senate Transportation Committee. The committee is to issue its report not later than December 15, 2015.

Lastly, the Association believes that the vast majority of vehicle owners give little thought to the fact that two plates are required—they simply take it for granted that Ohio vehicles have two plates. It appears that elimination of the front license plate is being undertaken to accommodate a very small vocal group that wants to eliminate the front plate.