

- Bureau of Motor Vehicles
- Emergency Management Agency
- Emergency Medical Services
- Office of Criminal Justice Services
- Ohio Homeland Security
- Ohio Investigative Unit
- Ohio State Highway Patrol

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Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 104 House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Staff Lieutenant Ed Mejia

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Perales, ranking member Craig and members of the House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety committee, I am Staff Lieutenant Ed Mejia with the Ohio State Highway Patrol. I would like to share with you today, information demonstrating the value of the current primary front license plate statute to law enforcement officers, specifically the Ohio State Highway Patrol. I have served with the division for nearly 25 years, over 24 of which was in field assignments where I witnessed firsthand, countless occasions of the value of our current the front license plate statute.

My testimony centers on whether or not to reduce display of a front license plate from the existing primary law, which is used as one of many tools by law enforcement officers across our state, to a secondary violation. To better understand law enforcement perspective on this issue, the first question you need to ask is – Can we afford to compromise public safety by reducing one of law enforcement tools to a secondary violation? What’s the nexus? The answer is public safety and deterrence. Ohio’s current front license plate statute assists’ law enforcement as a valuable tool to more efficiently and effectively provide service to the citizens of our state.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 70% of all serious crimes involve a motor vehicle. This includes kidnapping, violent crimes, major theft, drug smuggling, and much more. That considered why wouldn’t anyone want to provide law enforcement with

Mission Statement

“to save lives, reduce injuries and economic loss, to administer Ohio’s motor vehicle laws and to preserve the safety and well being of all citizens with the most cost-effective and service-oriented methods available.”

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the opportunity to apprehend a suspect vehicle. Reducing the primary front plate statute to a secondary violation will reduce law enforcement ability to make these apprehensions. I firmly believe that IF this change occurs there will be a degradation of compliance with the law and a significant impact to public safety will be realized.

The following are a few examples how Troopers are making a difference saving lives and deterring crime everyday on Ohio roadways as a result of primary vs. secondary violation:

- In 2014, Troopers made over 24,000 OVI arrests. The vast majority of these arrests often were a result of a primary law violation. Thousands of lives were saved as a result of the hard work and dedication of Troopers to keep our roadways safe from impaired drivers. Can we afford to compromise public safety by reducing one of law enforcement's tools to a secondary violation?
- In 2014, Troopers made over 11,000 drug arrests. The vast majority of these arrests often were a result of a primary law violation. With drug related heroin deaths on the rise in our state and across the nation, can we afford to compromise public safety by reducing one of law enforcement's tools to a secondary violation?
- In 2014, Troopers made 489 illegal weapons arrests. The vast majority of these arrests often were a result of a primary law violation. Once again, consider how many potential victims of gun violence were saved or how many crimes were prevented as a result of primary law violation. Can we afford to compromise public safety by reducing one of law enforcement's tools to a secondary violation?
- Ohio school bus drivers routinely report violations of passing a stopped school bus to law enforcement officers for investigation. This violation, which endangers our children, is reported in most cases when a vehicle approaches the stopped bus in the opposing direction. The bus drivers typically document the front license plate, a description of the vehicle and driver and report the information through appropriate channels for an

investigation by the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction in the area. The Ohio State Highway Patrol alone successfully locates and charges nearly 400 offenders per year. Reducing the primary front plate statute to a secondary violation will reduce law enforcement ability to make these apprehensions. The primary message should be public safety and deterrence. Keeping the primary front plate statute sends that message.

- The front license plate provides invaluable information to officers responding to the scene of an emergency in which a license plate of a vehicle involved has been observed. The vehicle description and license plate number is dispatched to responding officers who can simply read the license plates of oncoming vehicles in attempts to identify and apprehend the suspect. This becomes particularly beneficial during the nighttime hours. The alternative forces officers to take their eyes from the roadway and attempt to observe the rear license plate by utilizing the rear view or side view mirror while in emergency response or stop and set stationary. Officers respond to emergencies daily that include kidnapping, robbery, assault, domestic violence and more. The chances of successfully locating the vehicle fleeing the crime are dramatically increased with the front license plate. Reducing the primary front plate statute to a secondary violation will reduce law enforcement ability to make these apprehensions. The primary message should be public safety and deterrence. Keeping the primary front plate statute sends that message.
- The display of a front license plate serves as primary probable cause for law enforcement officers in routine traffic stops that reveal criminal behavior. This one violation has revealed the presence of stolen vehicles, illegal weapons and drugs, individuals on the terrorist watch list, wanted criminals and more. Reducing the primary front plate statute to a secondary violation will allow criminals to continue in their travels and maintain their criminal behaviors degrading the quality of life for the citizens of our state. The primary message should be public safety and deterrence. Keeping the primary front plate statute sends that message.

As you can see from the few examples I have just presented, the common denominator in these cases were primary law violations save lives and reduce crimes on our roadways to make our communities a safe place to live and work.

The Ohio General Assembly often takes up important public safety issues and moves forward to strengthen laws that protect Ohio's citizens. In my law enforcement career, I've seen these positive changes help to deter impaired driving and reduced crime on our roads and in our communities.

In summary, law enforcement is making a difference contributing to a safer Ohio everyday. Our current front license plate statute was enacted to promote public safety. It was a step forward to protect Ohio citizens.

I thank you for the opportunity to share this information and will be glad to address any questions you may have.