

November 29, 2016
Sponsor Testimony SB 217
Senate Agriculture Committee

Good morning, Chairman Hite, members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate Bill 271.

Many of you may remember the widely reported story in February from the city of Marietta, Ohio and the canine officer Ajax and his handler Officer Matt Hickey. Our office received many inquiries about the event from in the district and across the country. The situation exposed the need to clarify Ohio's laws surrounding the purchase of canine or equine officers by retiring police officers.

Currently, if a canine officer reaches an age and is no longer able to be part of a canine police unit, the dog may "retire" and be purchased, generally by their handler, for \$1. However, Ohio law is not as clear when a police officer retires but his or her canine partner is still able to serve, as was the case with Officer Hickey and Ajax.

Our bill establishes that if a police officer retires and has been assigned to a canine unit, he or she may purchase the canine (or equine) officer for fair market value provided the police department, sheriff's office, or Department of Public Safety agrees. The legislation was drafted with the intent to clarify existing law and to strike a balance between the needs of the officer, the canine, and the department and jurisdiction being served, while also respecting the public's significant investment in a canine officer.

We all know dogs and humans share a special bond that is as real as any of our relationships with people. When an officer has served his or her community for decades and is ready to retire, he or she should be able to keep their canine partner if that is what is best for the officer, the animal, and the department. We hope this bill will clarify that process.

Thank you for your time and I can take any questions you may have.