



Representative Theresa Gavarone
3rd House District

Sponsor Testimony for HB 115
Community and Family Advancement Committee
March 22, 2017

Chairman Ginter, Vice-Chair Conditt, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for HB 115, which will improve the relationship between police officers and people who suffer from a communication disability.

This idea came to me while my aide and I were meeting with a constituent. She has two autistic children, one of whom drives. Some of the symptoms of autism can mirror those of an impaired driver. Because of this reality and the fact that her son is not a small man, she is concerned that her son fidgeting, not responding or not making eye contact with an officer could potentially lead the officer to believe he was under the influence, or worse, cause the officer feel threatened.

I immediately wanted to figure out a way we could help officers and those who suffer from a communication disability stay safe during a routine traffic stop. I had the opportunity to speak to Bowling Green Police Chief Hetrick and Perrysburg Police Chief Paez about this issue and they were very supportive and gave me some great ideas.

We decided early on that having a mark or label on the license plate wouldn't be a good idea because of the inherent safety concerns. Ultimately, the decision was made to have an officer identify the driver of the vehicle when the plates are run through LEADS. If a person has a communication disability, that will be noted in LEADS for the officer to see.

Obviously, we want to respect people's privacy. This is a completely voluntary process and if a person fills out and submits the form, their information is kept in a closely guarded database that only officers can access.

Since introducing this legislation, Representative Wiggam and I have received support from both law enforcement and disability advocacy groups to move forward with this bill. You'll be hearing from many of these groups during future hearings.

The bottom line is this legislation is a positive for law enforcement and people who suffer from communication disabilities such as autism, a hearing impairment and PTSD. There are numerous instances

of people getting hurt because of the lack of communication and we believe providing officers with more information could prevent needless injuries and possibly save lives.

Chairman Ginter, thank you for allowing us to speak for House Bill 115 and we are ready to answer any questions the committee may have.