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Scott Wiggam
State Representative

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Sponsor Testimony Sub. House Bill 115
June 6, 2017

Chairman Coley, Vice-Chairman Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Substitute House Bill 115.

A couple months ago, a constituent contacted my office with a concern. Her son was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder early in his life, and was now nearing the time when he could begin to drive. With her son's diagnosis, communication barriers unfortunately can hinder social interaction with others. During our conversation, this mother shared with me her genuine concern that her son, due to this communication disability, may not be able to effectively communicate with law enforcement during a typical traffic stop. The lack of information available to police officers in situations such as this can unnecessarily escalate confrontations between a citizen and a member of law enforcement.

To assist Ohioans like her son, and public safety officials, Representative Gavarone and I have introduced Substitute House Bill 115. This legislation will strengthen families and communities by establishing a voluntary enrollment initiative where individuals who have been diagnosed with a communication disability can notify law enforcement of this potential hindrance. Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities will establish a simple form that an individual, or the parent or legal guardian of an individual, may take to their doctor to verify the communication disability. Also, this form will provide a space for all license plates of vehicles owned or operated by the individual to be included in the enrollment initiative. To also assist law enforcement and individuals with communication disabilities, this form will provide a space for the driver's license identification number of the individual. This form is then delivered to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, where the BMV will make this information accessible to law enforcement through the Law Enforcement Automated Data System, more commonly referred to as LEADS.

Through this streamlined system, law enforcement is able to access this information through the standard procedure of running a license plate before approaching a vehicle, and also by running the driver's license through the LEADS system. This information can be gathered by the officer by utilizing the technology in the police vehicle, or by relaying the individual's information to a 911 dispatcher from their radio.

Additionally, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, this “No Labels Initiative” is the first of its kind in the country, where individuals who wish to partake in this opportunity will not be subject to a physical symbol on their license plates or driver’s license. Substitute House Bill 115 is another example of Ohio leading the nation as we bridge the communication gap between civilians and law enforcement.

Organizations such as the Ohio Association Chiefs of Police, the Deaf Services Center, the Ability Center, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Arc Ohio, and the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities, have joined us in support of Substitute House Bill 115. By providing this information on a voluntary basis, individuals who wish to make law enforcement aware of a potential communication barrier may easily do so, and law enforcement appreciates having this information readily available when approaching an unknown individual.

I am proud of the legislation before you today. This is a comprehensive bill that serves our state’s most vulnerable, and also assists those who selflessly protect and serve our communities. By accomplishing this mission through utilizing available resources and technology, Ohio is proving once again to be a national leader. I urge you to support this legislation, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions.