

Northern Ohio Fire Fighters

Proponent Testimony

HB 38

Senate Judiciary Committee

April 10, 2018

Good morning Chairman Bacon, Vice Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Pat Lovejoy and I am currently a member of the Parma Fire Department and have proudly served the City of Parma and its residents as a Fire Fighter/ Paramedic for 23yrs. I also serve as the Vice President of the Northern Ohio Fire Fighters (NOFF) which is made up of over 20 local fire departments representing active and retired firefighters in five different counties (Cuyahoga, Summit, Lake, Wayne, and Portage.)

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 38 – The Public Safety and Military Protection Act.

Aggressive acts against firefighters hamper our primary mission of putting out fires and saving lives. I would like to give some first account examples of situations that have placed the role of Fire Fighters/Paramedics/EMT'S in a position of potential harm, by offenders the same as we see with Peace officers.

In recent years we have seen the implementation of SWAT medics who are trained with law enforcement officials to respond in hostage situations, serving warrants, and most recently the increased number of mass shootings. These SWAT medics place themselves in the same situations as law enforcement personnel while entering hostile active shooter situations to administer life saving measures to law enforcement officials if they are injured pursuing offenders. They are also able to treat life threatening injuries to any victim during such situations. We would not want to see offenders purposely targeting medics so they could not render care to the law enforcement officers or victims.

Fire personnel have also been placed in volatile situations where offenders have purposefully ambushed them when responding to fires. A number of years back, the Parma Fire Department responded to a reported house fire and had encountered a situation where the home owner had set fire to the home. This owner was armed as he barricaded himself behind the front door awaiting the arrival of fire personnel which created a potentially hostile and dangerous environment for all service personnel on scene. This not being an

isolated incident and where there is an apparent growing concern of escalating violence, the safety of emergency responders as a whole becomes all of our responsibility.

In an article just last week in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Akron Fire and EMS personnel were issued ballistic vests for when being dispatched to potentially dangerous calls. Eg, Domestic Violence, Shooting situations, Drug overdoses, escalating public demonstrations and protests. The Mayor of Akron made this statement, "This is the unfortunate but necessary result of changes in our landscape, including the increasing frequency of volatile and dangerous emergency situations," Mayor Dan Horrigan said in the release. "One of our highest responsibilities is to the safety of our first responders. Our firefighters [and] medics can't help others unless they are safe and protected themselves."

Currently, the Ohio Revised Code protects state law enforcement officers specifically when a purposeful, intentional and pre-meditated attack of violence occurs. HB 38 would now include other public safety forces such as firefighters, EMT's and members of the military to be covered under the state law when an intentional and pre-meditated charge of murder or aggravated-murder occurs.

As those who protect the public, we are simply asking to receive the same protections that law enforcement personnel receive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on HB 38 and I would welcome any questions you may have as you consider this important piece of legislation.

Respectfully,

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