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Phillip M. Robinson Jr.
State Representative
Ohio House District 6

The Protect Law Enforcement Act / House Bill 317 Sponsor Testimony
House State & Local Government Committee
December 1, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the Ohio House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill (HB) 317, the Protect Law Enforcement Act, (PLEA). My joint sponsor, Representative Adam Miller, and I look forward to productive conversations with the committee and all related stakeholders.

We can all agree that we want to keep Ohioans safe, and we want to both aid and keep safe law enforcement as they keep us safe. One of the best ways to accomplish this through HB 317, creating universal background checks in the state of Ohio. PLEA, if enacted, would require all firearms transactions to be processed by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), closing the current loopholes in law that allow many guns sales to occur without a background check through online sales, at gun shows, and other private transfers.

Current federal law already requires licensed dealers to perform a background check at the time of purchase. HB 317 would hold unlicensed gun sellers in the state of Ohio to the same standards as federally licensed dealers and would make Ohio a point of transfer state, meaning that a background check would be required at the time the transaction is conducted. Private sellers would complete transfers and sales at either a federally licensed dealer or with their local law enforcement agency who already conduct background checks. This would not inconvenience unlicensed sellers or buyers. Federal firearms listings indicate that every Ohioan lives within 10 miles of a gun dealer, with 2,284 unique gun dealers in the state.

To reduce violent crime, gun violence and mass shootings, and deter self-harm; we need to keep guns out of the hands of minors, felons, criminals, and domestic abusers. By passing HB 317 and closing the loophole in the background check process, we can help end easy access to guns by those who should not have guns and anyone who would sell them firearms.

Just as important as protecting Ohioans is supporting the police and law enforcement as they keep us safe. For each person that poses a danger with a gun that doesn't have one after failing a background check, that's one less crime scene where an officer or civilians could lose their lives. Police officers deserve to feel secure on the job so they can do their jobs and keep our

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communities safe. Law enforcement are some of the first who would tell you about their concerns with the easy access to firearms, like online sales.

Online gun markets like Armlist.com are where a massive number of unchecked gun sales are taking place between strangers, potential criminals, and other prohibited purchasers. In 2018, there were more than 127,000 Ohio ads on Armslist.com for firearm sales that would not require a background check. Ohio had the highest number of total ads that did not require a background check across the country. Research on buyers on Armslist.com revealed that 1 in 12 would-be buyers in Ohio would have failed a background check, a rate 5.5 times higher than those who fail background checks at licensed dealers or where checks are required.

Since 1998, NICS data shows more than 81,000 gun sales in Ohio were denied based on their background check, including more than 37,000 illegal sales to convicted felons, over 16,000 illegal sales to prohibited domestic abusers, and more than 8,300 illegal sales to prohibited purchasers due to unlawful drug use. With that many denials through licensed dealers, imagine the number of sales that would be denied to buyers from unlicensed sellers if a background check had occurred.

My constituents and most Ohioans have shown they want action on this issue. More than 90% of Ohioans support universal background checks for gun purchases and 87% of Ohio gun owners support background checks. Part of this is a reaction to gun violence in our state.

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control data from 2013 to 2017 indicates that every year, more than 1,400 Ohioans are killed with guns and thousands more are shot and injured. Like most other states, Ohio has had mass shootings like the recent 2019 Dayton shooting and many other high profile cases, but there are an even more mass shootings the press don't report on because of where they occur in the inner city and are not counted the same way. If even one of those shootings could have been prevented with universal background checks, if one of the thousands of lives lost could have been saved, it would be worth it.

PLEA is a plea to support law enforcement's efforts to keep dangerous weapons out of dangerous hands. It is a plea to help keep children, students and families safe. It is a plea for the commonsense gun safety reform that Ohioans want.

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the committee, I thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

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