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Committees:

Agriculture & Natural Resources, Vice Chair
Ways & Means
General Government & Agency Review
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Special Appointments:

Coal Technical Advisory Committee
Dental Loan Repayment Advisory Board
Tax Expenditure Review Committee
Pickaway County Transportation Improvement District

Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 359 — Sponsor Testimony
Wednesday September 23, 2020

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 359.

Modeled after a similar piece of legislation that was recently enacted in the state of Georgia, Senate Bill 359 enhances protections for Ohio's emergency service responders - professional and volunteer firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and police officers -- as well as their families.

Over the past few months, we have seen how our nation's emergency responders have been the targets of intimidation, harassment, and assault. Around the country, responders have been followed home, their property has been targeted, and their families intimidated. Here in Ohio, traffic cones have been used to identify an officer's home so that protestors can find it, protesters show up to first responder's houses, and flyers containing threats to first responders have circulated throughout their own neighborhoods. This has caused many of these brave men and women to leave their careers as they no longer feel safe.

To cover first responders and their families, the bill amends the current Revised Code in four main ways.

Intimidation:

The bill amends the current Revised Code intimidation language to charge a third degree felony to anyone who knowingly does either of the following:

- Attempts to influence, intimidate, or hinder an emergency service responder from discharging their duties through the use of force, threat, or by filing a false report.
- Attempts to intimidate, harass, or terrorize an emergency service responder, or their family, by causing over \$50 in damages to real or personal property.

Civil Action:

The bill allows for law enforcement officers to file a lawsuit against people or organizations who restrict the officer's civil rights during the performance of their duty or for filing a knowingly false complaint against the officer. In doing so, the officer may recover fees for emotional distress, court costs and other reasonable expenses.

Assault:

The Revised Code sections for assault and felonious assault would also be amended under the bill. For assault, the bill's language increases the penalty for assault of emergency service responders or their family from a fourth degree felony to a third degree felony. For felonious assault, language is added to ensure that the current first degree felony penalty for peace officers would cover harm done to intimidate, harass, or terrorize emergency service responders or their family.

Arson:

Lastly, the bill would add language to say that prison terms are to run consecutively for those who commit arson or aggravated arson against emergency service responders, or their families, in order to intimidate, harass, or terrorize them.

Additionally, I should mention that I have begun working on a sub bill for your consideration soon to include language focusing on menacing of officers and to clarify language on the harassment of officers.

As a legislative body, we need to ensure that these men and women who bravely serve our communities are protected from those who vilify, target, and attack them for personal or political gain. It is our duty to show our support and offer this protection for all of our extraordinary emergency service responders.

First responder organizations supporting this legislation include:

Fraternal Order of Police
Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police
Troopers for a Safer Ohio
Buckeye State Sheriff's Association

Ohio Fire Chief's Association
Ohio Ambulance and Medical
Transportation Association

Thank you once again Chairman Eklund and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.