



# POLICE DEPARTMENT

## CITY OF TALLMADGE

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### House Civil Justice Committee Proponent Testimony on Ohio HB 439 January 18, 2022

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 439.

My name is Ralph Stover. I am a police officer for the City of Tallmadge Police Department and the Summit County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Coordinator for law enforcement. As the CIT Coordinator for Summit County, I work to connect and bridge the gap between the law enforcement agencies and mental health agencies in our county. When I began my career in law enforcement, I had no idea how often I would cross paths with an individual struggling with mental illness. As I progressed throughout my career, I developed a passion for mental health and want to find a way to better serve those living with mental illness.

It is probably common knowledge that police officers often deal with the same people multiple times in their community. As we deal with an individual struggling with mental illness, we learn more about them after each incident. Officers begin to learn that individual's story, their behaviors when in crisis, and what type of treatment they receive. Officers also have a general idea of what that individual's baseline is when mentally stable.

When that individual begins to decline, their family will often reach out to law enforcement for assistance. The family will explain the situation and request a welfare check. In many cases, officers will quickly realize that the individual's mental health is declining but determine that the person is not yet dangerous enough to warrant emergency hospitalization. Officers can usually see the "writing on the wall" and know that the individual is a few days away from being in major crisis but are left with no choice than to tell the family to call back when their loved one gets worse. House Bill 439 would prevent situations like this from happening. With the added fifth criterion, officers would be able to act sooner and get the individual an emergency examination before they are in a major crisis.

I would like to leave you with a personal example from my career where House Bill 439 would have been very helpful. For privacy purposes, I will refer to the individual as Mr. Jones. My department had been dealing with Mr. Jones for multiple years. Mr. Jones was diagnosed with schizophrenia and several other mental health disorders. His family was very involved and would often call our department to conduct welfare checks. Mr. Jones lived alone in a house, but was supported by his family, particularly his father. Mr. Jones had a long history of being non-compliant with his medication and mental health treatment. He often told officers that he stopped taking his medication because he was

allergic to it. Due to the frequent contacts our department had with him; we were able to notice a cycle/pattern in his behaviors.

Mr. Jones was very delusional, but as his condition worsened, his delusions would evolve. Mr. Jones often had delusions that the police were demons who were trying to kill him. He even hoarded knives and stashed them throughout his house. As the delusions evolved, it was a good indicator that a crisis situation was looming. When Mr. Jones did go into crisis, he was very violent. When in crisis, Mr. Jones would create situations that were very dangerous to himself, the public, and officers. He was usually unable to be de-escalated resulting in a use of force situation. An example of this type of situation follows. Officers were notified by family that Mr. Jones was no longer compliant with his treatment and medication. The family warned us that Mr. Jones was not doing well and were concerned about his welfare. Officers checked on Mr. Jones and recognized that he was declining but were not able to act at that moment. Several days later, officers were notified by family that Mr. Jones was threatening to kill himself. The family advised that Mr. Jones was yelling and screaming and sounded like he was out of control. Officers arrived at the residence. Mr. Jones refused to answer the door but communicated to us through the front bay window. As we watched Mr. Jones and tried to communicate with him, he was irate and destroying things. The situation was pure chaos. He appeared to be fighting things that we could not see. Mr. Jones was so delusional, that he called 911 and asked the dispatcher to send the Tallmadge Police. As the situation progressed, Mr. Jones also brandished a knife and threatened to harm officers. Officers eventually had to force entry into the home. We attempted to communicate with Mr. Jones but were unsuccessful. Mr. Jones threw things at us and was very violent and hostile. Unfortunately, Mr. Jones had to be tased and handcuffed. After we gained control of the situation, Mr. Jones still thought we were demons. As the crisis incidents with Mr. Jones began to pile up, they seemed to progressively worsen. Mr. Jones eventually began to hoard knives. He planned to use these knives to fight the demons. He also became so delusional that he ran out into the community under belief that he was fleeing from the FBI. Mr. Jones tried to enter random houses and eventually landed in a pizza shop causing a significant amount of damage to their facility. Under current law, officers were not able to intervene until Mr. Jones was in crisis which put many at risk. House Bill 439 would have allowed officers to intervene with Mr. Jones before he was in a major crisis. This would have lessened the risk of harm for everyone involved.

House Bill 439 would give officers another tool in their toolbox to better serve the community. When the writing is on the wall and we know that someone is days away from going into crisis, it does not seem fair for us to have to walk away and wait. It is not fair to the person, their family, or the first responders. I urge you to pass House Bill 439 and allow Ohio to join the twenty-four other states that already have psychiatric deterioration language in their statute.