

House Bill 283 Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives Criminal Justice Committee
John P. T. Gordon, President, Rusty's Story

September 23, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 283.

My name is John Gordon, and I am a retired law enforcement officer with 42 years of experience. I spent eight years in the USAF, three-and-a-half of which was providing security aboard Air Force One and Special Air Missions' aircrafts worldwide. I also served with the Allen County Sheriff's Office, the Marion Police Department, the Shelby Police Department, and the Marion County Common Pleas Court. My wife and I had one child whom we nicknamed "Rusty," and he was also a law enforcement officer.

The hardest call for service I experienced was making death notifications to family members about the loss of a loved one regardless of the circumstances. More often than not, the notification was due to a traffic crash. These types of calls are extremely difficult for a law enforcement officer.

I never expected that my family would receive this type of notification, but in the late evening hours of May 18, 2008 there was a knock on my door. I found a young deputy from the same department where my son and I held our commissions giving me the same news that I had delivered hundreds of times. My only child had been killed in a traffic crash. The investigation ultimately determined that the other driver had been texting at the time of the fatal crash.

Our story is unique in that I instructed my son, and only child, at the Marion Ohio Basic Police Academy. The young man who killed my son also graduated from this same academy, and I instructed him too. This young man received 20 days in jail for killing our only child. Our son was married and had two children who were in elementary school at the time. Our son's family was denied a husband and father for the remainder of their lives; whereas, this young man is still able to celebrate holidays, like Christmas, birthdays, Labor Day, etc. with his family. Rusty's mother and I are struggling to perform chores during our senior years. Our son was always there to assist us anytime we requested his help before he was killed by a man who had hoped to also become a police officer.

Since learning about the dangers of distracted driving, I have received training at the U.S Department of Transportation and the National Safety Council. I created a safety program called "Rusty's Story" and have talked to over 34,000 people in four states. I am doing my part to save lives; this legislature needs to do its part and support this bill.

You have the opportunity today to do the right thing and pass HB 283. Hands-free laws have proven to be effective. Law enforcement has been handcuffed from the opportunity to save lives for too many years. HB 283 will give law enforcement the tools they need to equitably enforce distracted driving in Ohio. Many laws have already been passed in Ohio in order to save lives on Ohio's roadways. Now, the Ohio legislature needs to act to prevent deadly crashes caused by motorists trying to operate a vehicle while driving blind because of looking down at a mobile device in their hand.

In closing, how many lives can you save with your “yes” vote? Again, thank you for your consideration to vote YES on HB 283.