



September 22, 2021

**Testimony of Jimmy Stewart, President
Ohio Gas Association
H.B. 283 (Representative Abrams)**

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Jimmy Stewart and I am President of the Ohio Gas Association. On behalf of the members of the OGA, I am offering proponent testimony on H.B. 283 and urge its passage.

The Ohio Gas Association is Ohio's natural gas trade organization comprised of more than 30 local distribution companies and cooperatives as well as the majority of Ohio's intra and inter-state gas transmission companies. As Ohio's shale gas supply has grown, the OGA has also grown to include Ohio natural gas producers, mid-stream companies and many other affiliate members. Together, the member companies of the OGA serve more than 3.6 million Ohio customers.

H.B. 283 is a timely and necessary means to improve public safety, including the safety of Ohio's natural gas utility workers. Ohio remains one of only four states in the nation that have not designated distracted driving as a primary offense. H.B. 283 will rectify this by giving law enforcement personnel an important tool in fighting distracted driving, particularly texting while driving. For the members of the OGA, this is entirely welcomed as we have experienced a dramatic increase in work zone incidents involving distracted drivers.

Ohio's utility workers perform work in a manner that is similar to first responders. They are often in tight and exposed circumstances and responding to emergencies or other incidents that are vitally important to the health, safety and comfort of the majority of Ohioans. Their safety needs to be protected as much as possible. While there are always measures that we as an industry can put in place to improve work zone safety, statistics demonstrate that the thing that will make the biggest single impact is to reduce distracted driving. Through April 2021, fatalities involving speed, younger drivers (aged 15-25), pedestrians and commercial vehicles are higher than the year prior. Despite reduced traffic volumes (due to COVID) and despite advanced safety features installed in newer vehicles, traffic deaths have increased in six of the past seven years. Moreover, pedestrian fatalities increased 38% from 2019 to 2020 and intersection fatalities increased 40% over the same time-period. Let's face it, as we all have traveled Ohio's highways and roadways we have witnessed distracted driving. It has become the "rule" not the "exception". As these statistics have increased, so too have our members experienced a corresponding increase in work zone incidents involving distracted drivers.

On behalf of the members of the Ohio Gas Association, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on H.B. 283. Our industry works daily to improve the safety of our personnel and all Ohioans. H.B. 283 represents an important opportunity to improve public safety and as such we urge its expeditious passage.