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**House Criminal Justice Committee
February 8, 2022
Senate Bill 16 – Proponent Testimony**

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Steve Agenbroad, and I am the Fire Chief at the Clearcreek Fire District in Warren County. I am pleased to testify today as Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association in support of Senate Bill 16.

Unfortunately, the times we live in, and the way first responders are viewed by some in society, makes Senate Bill 16 necessary. Although once revered by those we serve, this is decreasingly the case in many areas of the state, and those sworn to serve the public have instead become targets of other's anger, spite, and frustration. Many times, attacks on first responders are made while they are engaged in patient care or other duties, and they are caught off-guard with little or no time to defend themselves. Such attacks also jeopardize the health and well-being of those requesting our services.

The increased penalties for assaulting, impeding, and/or intimidating first responders or their family members are appropriate and will hopefully serve as a deterrent for such activities. Fire/EMS personnel are recognized as the first line of defense in a civilized society. When called into action, first responders are compelled by oath of office to render aid, conduct suppression efforts, or otherwise mitigate the emergency without consideration for the emotional temperature within that particular response area. Although we make every attempt to avoid unsafe scenes, many times the threat to our health and welfare is not readily apparent.

In addition to the increased penalties for committing violence against a first responder, SB 16 enacts the offense of unlawfully impeding public passage of an emergency service responder. This provision addresses the reckless obstruction of a highway, street, sidewalk, or other public passage in such a manner as to render it impassable if the obstruction prevents an emergency vehicle from accessing or exiting an emergency scene. While maintaining one's right to lawfully assemble, Senate Bill 16 draws a distinction between this constitutional right and the overt impedance of emergency activities of first responders. Actions of civil unrest that elevate to the point where we cannot respond to the emergency scene or to a medical facility while transporting a critical patient are intolerable.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association, I am pleased to offer our strong support for Senate Bill 16 and thank Senator Schaffer for his leadership in introducing this legislation. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions that members of the committee have.