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Ohio State Highway Patrol Testimony of Colonel Richard Fambro Transportation Budget Bill House Finance Committee February 9, 2021

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Minority Member Crawley and Members of the House Finance Committee: I am Colonel Richard Fambro, superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. It is an honor to appear before you today to testify on the budget for the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

2020 challenged the Patrol to extend its operations outside our core mission to fill the needs of communities around the state. While the year brought significant change it also brought opportunity to transform the landscape of our role in communities. Troopers redefined service while maintaining safety on our roadways by removing violations that were a threat to the public.

Never before in the history of the Highway Patrol, had we faced such enormous opposing obstacles simultaneously and on multiple fronts. As part of our COVID-19 pandemic response, the Ohio State Highway Patrol modified our primary focus to provide essential assistance to local communities, while also meeting the needs of our public safety partners.

Patrol personnel participated in food distributions and partnered with schools, community groups and other government agencies. We provided additional security to Ohio prisons, mask relays to Battelle to ensure clean masks were available to first responders, and critical medicine relays to include Remdesivir from the Ohio Department of Health to areas across the state. In total, our Division participated in 442 details and security missions related to the pandemic.

There is no doubt our operations have changed considerably from those of years past, not only due to COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines, but also due to the necessity of protecting our citizens and capitol during civil unrest. However, something which remains consistent is our fervent commitment to the citizens of Ohio.

Throughout 2020, the Ohio State Highway Patrol's Criminal Intel Unit and Ohio's primary Fusion Center, the Statewide Terrorism Analysis & Crime Center, provided critical Intel support and threat assessments related to protests tied to COVID-19 and social justice across Ohio.

As demonstrations intensified and became civil disturbances requiring law enforcement intervention, the Ohio State Highway Patrol was there to ensure the safety of those who gathered to be heard in a peaceful manner and protect the property. We made it clear we would not tolerate violence, vandalism and other criminal acts within our jurisdiction.

In both professional and genuine ways, Troopers prioritized the safety of others above their own so that everyone could feel safe to exercise their first amendment rights while protecting property.

In fact, the Patrol was engaged in support or collaboration of 795 demonstrations in more than 178 cities in Ohio this past year – and 250 of those demonstrations saw state troopers responding in person to work side-by-side with local law enforcement.

We continued in our role as the state's safety net, and provided free services and resources to communities that made local impacts on safety and security. Some of these no cost services include Special Response Team (SRT), Aviation, Mobile Field Force and training courses. It's important to note that throughout the year, the quality of service we delivered was not interrupted. The Patrol continued to serve the public by rendering assistance, answering calls for service, providing emergency and lifesaving actions if needed, and remaining visible in an effort to provide safety and instill calm.

In 2019, the Patrol established a Diversity Office and implemented a statewide Diversity and Inclusion Training Course. This was a vital step toward celebrating diversity and the individual talents of current and future employees. The Diversity Office also created a Diversity Core Planning group that meets regularly to discuss diversity within our agency and secure the following goals: provide oversight of professional operations; obtain more protected class in each Training Academy class and increase a diversified pool of eligible employees for supervisor positions.

In our recruitment efforts we pivoted from traditional avenues to ensure we are reflective of the communities we serve and in which troopers live. Our approach focused on community and faith based groups; NAACP, Urban League, minority festivals to include Asian festivals, women's events, YMCA's and YWCA's and historically black colleges to name a few.

All of these efforts are focused to improve our diverse workforce and emphasize the importance of equal and intrinsic value. The Patrol was able to accomplish this by using the value engagement approach and adding Diversity to our core values to ensure it is equally weighted along with the other principles our organization was founded upon. In fact in 2020, the Patrol also launched a Women's Mentorship Program. The Program is based on enriching successful careers, fostering skills and abilities for future leaders, facilitating personal development and continuing to build an inclusive organizational culture.

I want to take a moment to speak directly about the work we do for you to make your workplace – the Statehouse – safe.

Subject to the availability of funds specifically appropriated by the general assembly for security detail purposes, the Ohio State Highway Patrol provides security for the Governor, other state government officials at the direction of the Governor, Capitol Square, the Vern Riffe Center, James A. Rhodes state office tower and other state properties.

In an ongoing basis, we are reassessing security for this building. In light of the current climate, present and additional security measures are being examined to meet the needs of today.

While I can't go into specific security details, here at the Statehouse we are examining procedures for entrance, screening of visitors at public entrances, pre-screened access and interior security. All with the intent of keeping you safe and ensuring work can occur uninterrupted. Furthermore, I am happy to report there is tremendous coordination and collaboration between the Patrol and Sergeant at Arms.

Our Intel Unit provides detailed threat assessments on protests, demonstrations and other events that could disrupt business at the Statehouse and the Capitol Square area. This threat information, as appropriate, is shared with the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board director, Department of Administrative services Security Administrator, the Sergeant at Arms, and Columbus Division of Police.

Amidst the organizational shift we made due to the pandemic and response to demonstrations and protests, we never lost sight of our mission critical services. We continued to remove the criminal element from our roadways and focus on traffic safety efforts with the intent to keep crime out of our communities and the roads safe for those who live or travel in Ohio.

Enforcement and education related to four specific threats of drunk drivers, illegal drugs, distracted driving and highway crime are some things we do best. State troopers are out there every day and night, in all 88 counties, focused on

preventing traffic crashes and keeping families safe. The Patrol, since inception in 1933, has been fully committed to ensuring Ohio remains among the safest places in America to drive, work and live.

According to provisional data Ohio lost 1,236 people last year because of choices such as not wearing a seatbelt, distracted driving, illegal drugs and driving impaired. Unfortunately over the last five years, Ohio has averaged over three traffic fatalities and 11 overdose deaths per day.

Distracted driving continues to be a danger to everyone using the road, not just the person sending or receiving the text. More than 100,000 distracted driving crashes occurred in Ohio from 2013 to today resulting in over 53,000 injuries and 341 persons killed. In 2020, troopers issued more than 9,400 citations for distracted driving violations and remains a focus for the Patrol. This budget bill includes a provision to provide law enforcement an additional tool to fight distracted driving by making it a primary offense.

There is an increased connection between drugs and guns, which is demonstrated by the rise of weapons seized by the Patrol involving narcotics.

During 2020, the Patrol investigated 671 incidents involving both an illegal weapon and a drug violation on traffic stops initiated by troopers. This is a significant increase as compared to 2019, where 420 similar incidents were reported. Additionally last year, the Patrol seized 1,746 guns that were associated with illegal activity, a 33 percent increase from 2019.

Last year we also had success in the recovery of stolen vehicles. Troopers recovered 1,471 stolen vehicles in 2020, a 23% increase from 2019 totals.

Additionally, troopers removed a large number of pills from Ohio roads in 2020. This included significant increases in the seizure of opiate, depressant, stimulant and hallucinogen pills.

Our core mission revolves around those types of critical safety and security areas where every day, across Ohio, state troopers and professional staff directly and positively impact and local communities.

We appreciate the support you have shown to law enforcement and to the Ohio State Highway Patrol during these unique times. I will tell you, your support to police officers, sheriff deputies and state troopers matters and is appreciated by those on the front lines.

As I conclude my testimony today, at every opportunity, the women and men of the Ohio State Highway Patrol have produced extraordinary accomplishments during unprecedented times. Our collective work serves as a blueprint and foundation for the future.

As you undertake the important work of considering our budget, I know we have an even greater opportunity to contribute to a safer Ohio in the next biennium.

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Minority Member Crawley and Members of the House Finance Committee, I again thank you for today's opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. I am happy to answer questions.