



**Ohio Department of Public Safety
Testimony of Director Thomas Stickrath
Transportation Budget Bill
House Finance Committee
February 9, 2021**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and Members of the House Finance Committee: I am honored to serve as the Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's portion of the Transportation Budget Bill to fund the operations of three of the Department's six divisions, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and the Division of Emergency Medical Services. I do look forward to talking about our other divisions and initiatives including RecoveryOhio, the Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center, the Ohio School Safety Center, the Ohio Traffic Safety Council, among others, at a later time.

For those of you who I have not had the opportunity to meet, I have been serving as the Director of Public Safety for two years now under Governor DeWine. Before this position, I served as the Superintendent of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), overseeing the state crime lab and a team of law enforcement professionals. I also served as the Director of the Department of Youth Services under Governors Taft and Strickland, and this is my second opportunity to serve as the Director of Public Safety. Earlier in my career, I served in a number of leadership roles at the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

Today, I will be joined by Ohio State Highway Patrol Colonel Fambro in testimony. I also have members of my senior staff here – Bureau of Motor Vehicles Registrar Charlie Norman, Division of Emergency Medical Services Executive Director Rob Wagoner, and Chief Financial Officer Matthew Martin – should you have any questions.

It is difficult to discuss our divisions without thinking about the pandemic in which we are still living. Our agency has been profoundly impacted by COVID-19 and, in some cases, our agency has had quite an impact.

In fact, with respect to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, the BMV, Deputy Registrar license agencies and driver license examination stations were temporarily closed effective March 19, 2020, due to COVID-19. As a result, driver license, identification card, and vehicle registration expiration dates were extended twice thanks to the General Assembly, first through December, then again through April of 2021. Deputy Registrar businesses reopened on May 26 and have processed more than nine million transactions. Driver exam stations resumed offering driving skills tests on June 16 with new public health and safety protocols in place to curtail the spread

of COVID-19 when obtaining these services. Restoration of these public services required substantial planning, sourcing of PPE, and installation of plexiglass barriers. Both Deputy Registrars and driver examination stations had to significantly change processes and procedures to protect the safety of both customers and staff. The BMV also created and implemented an entirely new, modified driving skills test that allowed examiners to remain outside of customers vehicles while conducting driving tests. Since implementation of this modified skills test, the BMV has conducted more than 330,000 modified driving tests.

Our Division of Emergency Medical Services, EMS, became engaged with the activation of the State Emergency Operations Center for the state's coordinated COVID-19 response by providing evaluation of PPE, mitigation of patient transportation issues, providing up-to-date guidance for all first responders to help protect the workforce, rule clarifications and updates to help EMS agencies continue operations when faced with personnel shortages, and expanding EMS providers' abilities to administer vaccinations. Certification eligibility deadlines for applicants, as well as fire and EMS certification expiration dates, were also extended twice under the General Assembly's guidance. EMS also remains integral in coordinating and disseminating vaccine information to first responders.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol modified its primary focus to provide essential assistance to local communities and meet the needs of our public safety partners. I know Colonel Fambro will be sharing more on this in his testimony.

And now, for our current funding situation...

When I appeared before this committee two years ago, I explained the structural deficiency that we have had with funding the Patrol and the BMV for quite some time.

Prior to FY04, the Patrol was principally funded by the gas tax, but that revenue source was phased-out and redirected to ODOT. I should note, we received zero dollars of the gas tax increase and zero dollars of the new hybrid/electric vehicle fees enacted last budget. In FY04, the Patrol's primary funding began to transition to motor vehicle registration fees, which brought in substantial revenue and sustained the Patrol for many years.

Of the cost of an annual registration fee paid at one of our Deputy Registrar locations, the Department receives approximately \$14.50 – the same amount since 2003. For example, of the \$66 per year that a resident of the City of Columbus pays to renew their registration, only approximately \$14.50 goes to the Department. Quite frankly, we are in a hole. Last year, the hole was about \$51 million, but fortunately we were able to work with OBM and the General Assembly to obtain a one-time infusion of \$35 million in GRF and a shift of \$16 million from operating expenses to capital expenses. As you know, utilizing ever increasing amounts of GRF to fill a structural deficit is not sustainable.

As I promised you two years ago, we have been very thoughtful about our spending within our agency and have been living within our means. Despite those efforts, next fiscal year (FY '22), we will face an additional \$33 million shortfall, then \$100 million in FY 23; and exponentially higher in years that follow.

To address these gaps, we are proposing a \$10 increase on all commercial and non-commercial vehicles and trailers. This increase will provide sufficient funding for an estimated 10 years.

We are also proposing a \$2 auto title fee increase (\$15 to \$17 dollars) on non-dealer-to-dealer transactions solely to support the Patrol's non-highway enforcement fund. The BMV is not impacted by the fee

whatsoever.

Our goal is to have 1,600 uniformed troopers and supervisors; we are currently at 1,539. Typically, we have about two Academy new-hire classes each year to maintain this number. Preserving these staffing levels is incredibly important to ensure we continue our enforcement and education efforts relating to four specific threats we face on our roadways - impaired drivers, illegal drugs, highway crime, and distracted driving. However, last calendar year, we only had one Academy class due to hiring restrictions. We do not have any classes scheduled this fiscal year, but depending on the availability of funding, we could have a class in July. On average, we lose about seven uniformed staff each month due to retirements and departures.

The non-highway enforcement fund covers costs associated with security at state properties, policing at the State Fair and Expo Center, investigations of crimes occurring at state properties including within prisons, executive protection including the Governor and others, and special details necessitated by civil unrest. This fund has experienced chronic shortages of cash, requiring us to seek assistance from the Controlling Board Emergency Purposes and Contingencies Fund twice, soon to be three times, due to the fact that expenses exceed revenues. I know Colonel Fambro will go into more detail about this in his testimony.

Turning to the BMV, I am happy to say that despite the challenges, the BMV has made incredible strides in increasing efficiency and improving customer service. Together with Lt. Governor Husted and InnovateOhio, the BMV launched its online queuing system at Deputy Registrar license agencies across the state, called "Get in Line, Online."

"Get in Line, Online" allows customers to use a smartphone or computer to remotely reserve their place in line at their local license agency. After checking in, customers can spend their time as they wish, not physically waiting at the BMV, and show up later that day to claim their spot in line. Customers also have electronic access to live interactive wait times to assist them in deciding which Deputy Registrar agency to visit and when. The BMV is striving to provide customers with more choices and better service at no additional cost.

Just as important as the customer-facing aspect of "Get In Line, Online" though is the new access to data it provides. The BMV has never had a reliable tool to measure line length and wait times, or compare service delivery. The BMV plans to use this data to streamline internal processes, as well as evaluate the Deputy Registrar process. In addition, Deputy Registrars can use the data as a management tool to monitor their employee efficiency, refine workflow, and benchmark their service delivery against their peers.

Also, over the past year, the BMV telecommunications overhaul reduced telephone wait times by 88 percent with nearly half of all calls being answered in less than 60 seconds. When I became Director, the average telephone hold time was over 25 minutes. With the understanding that this was an unacceptable measure, the BMV set out to revamp its telecommunications unit by rearranging call trees, changing message prompts, and making sure customers were aware of online services they could complete themselves with no wait. The BMV also shifted personnel to better address high call volume days and times, and instituted an interactive voice response system to get people where they need to be quicker. After those changes took place, the average hold time was reduced to just over three minutes.

And I think it is important to note that we have accomplished this while the BMV has been reduced to its lowest level of staffing in recent history.

As I turn to the Division of Emergency Medical Services, EMS, I would be remiss if I didn't take a brief opportunity to mention Representative Baldrige, Chair of the House Transportation & Public Safety committee and a former fire chief with Wayne Township Fire Department. With active certifications as a

Paramedic, Fire Fighter, and Fire Safety Inspector, we appreciate the experience he brings to the Legislature, and look forward to our continued partnership.

EMS certifies more than 55,000 fire and emergency medical service providers in Ohio. The Division also certifies all Ohio fire and EMS instructors, provides chartering and accreditation of fire and EMS training, and regulates medical transportation services. As I mentioned previously, the Division has been integral in the COVID-19 response, and will continue to be for some time. Also, many rural and volunteer EMS agencies continue to rely on funding assistance through the EMS Grants Program for training and equipment. In 2020, a specific PPE reimbursement fund was established to help these agencies offset the unforeseen and significant operational cost increases for PPE as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In closing, I will just reiterate our need for a long-term, sustainable funding source to maintain the current level of service. Revenue increases are never easy, but we are committed to working collaboratively with the General Assembly to ensure that these critical services continue – services on which the community and our local, state, and federal partners have come to rely for the safety and security of Ohioans.

Speaking of the safety of Ohioans, I would be remiss if I did not mention an important piece of this transportation budget bill that addresses the serious issue of distracted driving. The bottom line is that Ohio has not gone far enough to change the culture behind the wheel. We are one of four states that do not have a primary enforcement distracted driving law and I believe that this provision will undoubtedly save lives. I appreciate the Governor's leadership on the issue and support his efforts to keep Ohioans safe.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am looking forward to working with each of you in the months ahead. At this time, with your permission, I would like to turn it over to Colonel Fambro to share his testimony on the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Following the Colonel's testimony, we are happy to answer any questions from the members of the committee.