



# COUNTY ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

## Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Committee

HB 74 February 17, 2021

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Past Immediate President (2020) - County Engineers Association of Ohio

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of County Engineers Association in support of House Bill 74.

The County Engineer is an elected official, serving terms of four years. We have ownership and operational responsibility for the local infrastructure, as defined in the Ohio Constitution and Ohio Revised Code. Those responsibilities include the preparation of construction plans, specifications and estimates for improvements to all county roads. The County Engineer also serves as engineering advisor to all townships in their county, assisting them with township road improvements and maintenance. The office inspects and maintains all bridges on township and county roads and maintains traffic signals on county roads that intersect other county or township roads.

We are responsible for 26,859 bridges and 29,088 miles of urban and rural roadways that are vital to the continued growth and prosperity of our state. Although Ohio is ranked 35th in the nation by geographic size, it has the fourth largest interstate network that carries the fourth largest amount of truck traffic. The state is within a 600-mile drive of half of the nation's population and is considered a crossroad for America's manufacturing and agricultural industries.

CEAO would like to highlight the following items from Gov. DeWine's introduced version of HB 74 we support:

### **Bridge inspections**

Specifies that bridges must be inspected at least once every two years according to a schedule set by the Director of ODOT, rather than at least once every year as in current law.

### **Load limits on highways and bridges**

Removes the general vehicle weight exemption for a vehicle that runs on stationary rails or tracks (e.g. certain buses and cable trolleys). It also narrows the vehicle weight exemption that applies to all fire department vehicles (e.g., a fire engine) to certain vehicles under specified conditions.

Many low volume roads and bridges are not designed for these loads and can result in significant damage to the pavement and bridges. The blanket exemption for these loadings and axle configurations are very difficult to anticipate when designing a bridge-and are especially difficult to check against the capacities of our existing bridge inventory across our 88 counties. Simply put, it isn't

feasible to upgrade large numbers of structures in a county for one or two heavy fire department trucks

### **Highway maintenance and snow removal**

Permits ODOT's Director to enter into an agreement with a political subdivision to allow it to remove snow and ice from and to maintain, repair, improve, or provide lighting on interstate highways located within the political subdivision or to reimburse the political subdivision for such improvements. Additionally, this continues the Catastrophic Snowfall Program to provide monetary aid for snow removal costs for municipal corporations, counties, and townships that receive 18 or more inches of snow in a 24-hour period.

### **Hands-Free Ohio (Distractive Driving)**

As wireless communication technology has developed from cellphones to smart phones, and the range of electronic communication platforms has significantly broadened to include apps, cameras, social media, gaming, etc., laws curbing driver distraction must be updated to keep pace with the technology and ensuing distraction. The National Safety Council reports that cell phone use while driving leads to 1.6 million crashes each year. Nearly 390,000 injuries occur each year from accidents caused by texting while driving<sup>(4)</sup>

In a recent survey conducted by the CDC, texting while driving would appear to be alarmingly prevalent, "with 21 percent of drivers in a recent survey indicating that they have done so within the last month".<sup>(2)</sup> Among less experienced teen drivers, that number more than doubles! The use of electronic devices while driving imperils not only the distracted drivers, but all highway users. Those who are not distracted are victims of crashes that are caused by those who are.<sup>(3)</sup> My road crews share stories every summer of drivers passing through their construction zones with one eye on their phone and one eye, they hope, on the road.

Given that texting is disproportionately conducted by younger drivers who have grown up with the technology, the risk associated with texting while driving will only increase as the younger demographics of our population transition into becoming a larger percentage of drivers on our roads.

Each distracted driving death and serious injury irrevocably changes the lives of families and communities in Ohio. We urge you to support the Hands-Free Ohio (Distractive Driving Initiative) in HB 74 Transportation Budget, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

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(1) *State and Federal Efforts to Reduce Distractive Driving*, Kitch, Vol. 26, No. 23, June 2018

(2) *Distracted Driving*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 2, 2020

(3) *Driven to Distraction: Technological Devices and Vehicle Safety – Joint Hearing* Serial No. 111-79

CEAO would respectfully ask the committee to consider the following two items to be amended to HB 74.

### **Overweight Vehicle Fines (Amendment No. AM\_134\_0119)**

Amend ORC 5577.99 to clarify all overweight fines to the maintenance and repair of county roads, highways, bridges, or culverts. All fines imposed for violating the vehicle weight limit laws to be distributed to the county where the violation occurs.

This proposed amendment is not to increase fees or to make (and will not make) the weight enforcement programs “whole”, but to allow the distribution of the funds collected through civil action be credited back to the programs already created to protect our road and bridge infrastructure.

**Guardrail Standards (Amendment No. AM\_134\_0120)**

Amend ORC 5591.36 guardrail mandates to comply with state and federal design standards.

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