



**Ohio Department of Public Safety Director Tom Stickrath
House Finance Transportation Subcommittee
Operating Budget Bill
February 23, 2021**

Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Skindell, and Members of the House Finance Transportation Subcommittee: I am pleased to join you again today to now testify in support of the Department's portion of Governor DeWine's Executive budget.

My previous testimony covered our portion of the Transportation Budget, which funds three of our divisions, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and the Division of Emergency Medical Services.

Today, I will focus my testimony on the divisions and initiatives that are funded in the Operating Budget bill: Ohio Homeland Security, the Ohio Investigative Unit, the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, the Office of Criminal Justice Services, the Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center, and the Ohio School Safety Center. With me today are members of my Senior Staff – Assistant Director Karen Huey, Ohio Emergency Management Agency Executive Director Sima Merick, Office of Criminal Justice Services' Executive Director Karhlton Moore, Deputy Director of Law Enforcement Initiatives Ben Suver, and Chief Financial Officer Matthew Martin – who are ready and able to join me to answer any questions you may have.

As I mentioned in my previous testimony, 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.

As the world responded to a pandemic, the Ohio Emergency Management Agency took on the longest and most complicated activation in the state's history. Ohio's initial response to COVID-19 was largely coordinated from the State Emergency Operations Center, which activated on March 9 before any cases were confirmed in Ohio. To date, more than 2,300 missions have been completed, including moving more than 160 million pieces of PPE across Ohio.

Our Office of Criminal Justice Services was awarded nearly \$16 million in Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding as part of the federal CARES Act, to provide grants to local law enforcement, probation and parole offices, local courts, victim services providers, and adult, juvenile, and community corrections agencies to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the spread of COVID-19. Funding supported the purchase of PPE and cleaning supplies, supplemental domestic violence housing (hotels), technology for a mobile work environment, GPS monitoring, the cost to local jails for housing inmates who could not be transferred to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, and hazard pay for front-line workers.

Throughout 2020, Ohio Homeland Security worked with federal, state, and local partners to provide threat assessment support during both COVID-19 and social justice protests as well as the primary and general elections.

Agents with the Ohio Investigative Unit visited with permit holders on how to keep their business compliant and offer suggestions on how to keep patrons safe while adhering to the protocols in place.

Indeed, our department has worked tirelessly throughout the year, and I look forward to continuing the work of several critical programs that we launched in the last biennium thanks to funding from the General Assembly – namely efforts to improving community-police relations, expanding drug investigation assistance to law enforcement partners, reducing violent crimes and substance abuse, assisting local agencies in the recruitment and hiring of new peace officers, and supporting Ohio's schools.

Last biennium, we were able to secure funding to support Governor DeWine's RecoveryOhio initiative and priority of dismantling drug trafficking organizations in Ohio. As a result, he created the Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center, also known as the ONIC, within the department. ONIC offices were established in Columbus and Cleveland and consist of criminal intelligence analysts and computer forensic specialists who provide investigative, analytical, and data management support to local law enforcement agencies and drug task forces in Ohio. In fact, just last week we had the opportunity to train Ohio's sheriffs on issues such as the dark web and cryptocurrency.

A primary focus of the ONIC is assisting local law enforcement in analyzing digital evidence seized as part of drug trafficking investigations. A typical case may require sophisticated, highly advanced tools that are cost-prohibitive for local law enforcement. These tools, which the ONIC utilizes, are necessary to access crucial digital evidence that often contains hundreds of thousands of digital artifacts that could help law enforcement trace the drug trafficking organizations back to the ringleaders and suppliers. The ONIC supports those agencies who may not have the resources, time, or ability to investigate these types of cases fully. In May of this year, we look forward to training law enforcement partners across Ohio on these topics.

In 2020, our team processed an estimated 200 terabytes of data. They reviewed 2.6 million text messages, more than 3 million images, and nearly 120,000 videos from electronic evidence seized in narcotics cases. One drug task force commander described the ONIC as a “game-changer” in the world of drug trafficking investigations.

This biennium budget proposal seeks to invest \$6.5 million in expanding ONIC’s physical footprint into the northwest and southwest regions of Ohio as well as its investigative capacity to further support local law enforcement and other partners. By investing in additional space, manpower, and technology, the ONIC will have the capacity to support more cases and give law enforcement in these areas greater access to our critical resources and personnel.

As part of Governor DeWine’s STRONG Ohio initiative, Ohio Homeland Security, in partnership with Ohio EMA, awarded \$9 million in grant funds to non-profits to better protect themselves from violence and terrorism by improving their physical security, adding security personnel, and enhancing cybersecurity capabilities. Over 59 percent of the physical security grants and 50 percent of the personnel grants were awarded to houses of worship. Other entities awarded funds included educational services, nonprofit health care facilities, nonprofit museums, and schools.

Ohio Homeland Security’s Statewide Terrorism Analysis and Crime Center serves as Ohio’s primary fusion center and facilitates the gathering, analysis, and sharing of critical information in a timely and effective manner. It operates 24/7, providing first responders, private sector managers, and other partners with quick, accurate, actionable intelligence and information – including law enforcement and schools.

And I think we can all agree that nothing is more important than protecting our most valuable asset – our children. As part of his STRONG Ohio initiative, Governor DeWine created the Ohio School Safety Center within Ohio Homeland Security in August 2019 as a centralized office to focus exclusively on helping schools, law enforcement, and the mental health community prevent, prepare for, and respond to threats and acts of violence, including self-harm, through a holistic, solutions-based approach.

In 2020, the Center has reached more than 1,400 stakeholders through virtual training opportunities covering 77 Ohio counties. The Center is hoping to expand the training reach to the remaining counties in 2021 with this additional funding. The team will also plan for a school safety summit and find relevant training, seminars, and opportunities for Ohio's schools and first responders.

The Center's team members continue to assist schools with taking a proactive approach to student safety. The team assessed 2,800 emergency management plans in 2020, received 1,600 calls from schools, and responded to more than 4,000 emails requesting assistance. The Center is also responsible for the management of the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. In 2020, this 24/7 service received more than 150 tips among the following tip types: COVID-19, bullying, self-harm, threats of violence, administrative complaints, drug related, and miscellaneous. Furthermore, the Center has helped schools create and implement pandemic response procedures.

The previous budget included funding to procure open source media scanning tools to look for threats against Ohio schools and students. These sophisticated tools allow the Center to proactively scan for threats on a statewide level and have expanded the resource capacity of the center.

I am proud of what the Center has accomplished thus far, and with this additional investment of \$4.6 million, we will be able to provide more individualized support to schools and first responders, expand training, and increase the usage of the Safer Ohio Schools Tip Line to keep our kids safe.

I would like to turn now to the Office of Criminal Justice Services, also known as OCJS. OCJS serves a wide variety of agencies committed to reducing and preventing crime through research, technology, grants, and programmatic initiatives. OCJS also serves as the state criminal justice planning agency for Ohio. Last year alone, OCJS administered \$25 million in new grant money to local communities.

In addition to providing funding support, OCJS houses the state's anti-human trafficking coordinator and oversees the Family Violence Prevention Center. OCJS also serves as the administrative arm of the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board, which was formed in 2015 to create uniform core standards for Ohio's law enforcement agencies covering use of force, including deadly force, and hiring and recruitment. As of today, 90 percent of all of Ohio's law enforcement officers work for an agency that has voluntarily complied with these standards or is in the process of certification. These agencies serve 83 percent of Ohio's total population. However, the total number of certified agencies only accounts for slightly over half of all of Ohio's departments.

Collaborative standards also exist for community engagement, body cameras, bias-free policing, employee misconduct, telecommunicators, and, at the request of Governor DeWine, law enforcement pursuits and law enforcement's response to mass protests.

Through OCJS, this budget seeks to fund \$10 million in grants to local law enforcement agencies across the state to implement or enhance body-worn camera programs. It is important to note that this funding includes the body cameras themselves and other expenses associated with running the program, which in many cases can be as costly as the initial investment in camera equipment.

This budget will also provide \$8 million to help reduce violent crimes through state and local law enforcement agencies through flexible grant funding that can meet individual communities' needs with promising or proven crime-reduction strategies. Additionally, the budget will also support the development of the statewide eWarrant and protection order system to enhance the thoroughness, accuracy, and timeliness of submissions to state and federal databases.

Recognizing the need for a diverse and highly qualified law enforcement workforce, we also plan to invest \$1 million to support state and local law enforcement agencies in recruiting and hiring new peace officers.

Moving now to the Ohio Investigative Unit... agents investigate suspected illegal activity in liquor permit premises such as bars, restaurants, and carry-outs. Investigations may be related to locations operating without a permit or involvement in crimes of drug, gambling, counterfeiting, property, and human trafficking. In fact, in the last two years, agents have investigated 75 human trafficking or prostitution cases. Agents also investigate the illegal manufacture of alcohol, as well as businesses and individuals involved in food stamp fraud. From 2019-2020 agents conducted 177 food stamp investigations.

Also, in the past two years, OIU conducted nearly 500 trace-back investigations to determine whether alcohol was illegally sold or provided to an underage or already-intoxicated person involved in an alcohol-related crash or incident.

And finally, I would like to close by talking about the Ohio Emergency Management Agency. As I said before, EMA has been so very integral in the COVID-19 response...but the division has also been providing direct response and/or technical support to county emergency management agencies on several non-COVID incidents, sometimes simultaneously. We continue to work events from the beginning of this biennium that are still ongoing, such as the May 2019 Dayton tornadoes. Although it has been almost two years now, long-term recovery assistance continues to those local communities impacted by that tragic event.

We have also dealt with the Killen Power Plant Collapse in Adams County, the Wellsville Dam mitigation, the continued lakeshore flooding along Lake Erie, preplanning and monitoring of civil unrest incidents across the state, and numerous instances of monitoring and planning for presidential candidate visits, including the Presidential Debate in Cleveland.

And just last week, we have added Lawrence and Gallia Counties to that list. Representative Stevens, I want to thank you for your ongoing partnership and communication while we provide the support that counties in your district need due to the aftermath of severe weather.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. I appreciate the support from you and the members of the General Assembly during this biennium, and look forward to growing our successes during this next biennium. We are available to answer your questions at this time.