

3rd House District
Wood County

Columbus Office
Vern Riffe Center
77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111

614.466.8104
Rep03@ohiohouse.gov



Chairman
Armed Services and Veterans Affairs

Committees
Finance
Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Transportation and Public Safety
Technology and Innovation

HARAZ N. GHANBARI

State Representative | Ohio House District 3

March 23, 2021

Chairman Baldrige, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and colleagues of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee — thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 206.

House Bill 206, which grants Township Trustees the permissive authority to allow their township law enforcement officers to patrol and enforce the laws on stretches of interstate highway that run their jurisdiction, was known as House Bill 539 during the 133 General Assembly. During that time, it twice passed the House Criminal Justice Committee and subsequently passed with strong bipartisan support 73-20 on the House Floor. Unfortunately it didn't reach the Senate Floor. The legislation before you is the as-passed version from the House.

Northwest Ohio, in my district, is known as the crossroads of America. We have a major north/south route known as Interstate 75, a major east/west route known as the Ohio Turnpike, and other routes like 475, 23 and 280. Beyond what we know about the flow of dangerous drugs like fentanyl, we are also aware of criminal enterprises like organized retail crime, sex trafficking, and human trafficking. All of these involve the interstate.

These crimes of opportunity are targeting our communities. We have all read the headlines, and have spoken with constituents in our communities who have been impacted. Referencing the collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies, Ohio Attorney General David Yost was recently quoted in a news article announcing the arrest of 14 men in a human trafficking operation. The attorney general said these arrests, "... serve as a reminder that these crimes are more prevalent and closer to home than you may think."

While the passage of House Bill 206 will greatly enhance the interagency collaboration to address examples of criminal activity as mentioned above, it will also reduce accidents involving the motoring public therefore saving lives, preventing injuries, and helping to keep all of us safe. I recently asked the Ohio State Highway Patrol's Statistical Analysis Unit for a five-year recap of crashes in Wood County. During the period from Jan. 1, 2015 to June 8, 2020, there were 19,665 crashes in Wood County with Interstate 75 having the highest number of crashes during that time with 3,528. The facts are clear and protecting Ohioans is the genius of this bill with my joint sponsor Representative Michael O'Brien.

For example, Perrysburg Township, in my district of Wood County, has approximately eight miles of Interstate 75 within their jurisdiction; however, current revised code does not permit townships with less than 50,000 residents to patrol and enforce laws on our interstate system. Passage of House Bill 206 will enable departments such as Perrysburg Township to work collaboratively and seamlessly with other agencies such as the Ohio State Highway Patrol and others to help reduce these staggering statistics.

As a direct result of our collaborative interested party meetings, the following checks and balances were incorporated into House Bill 206:

- The highway is part of the interstate highway system
- The township has a population between 5,000 and 50,000 residents
- Township trustees through resolution have granted authority to patrol the applicable interstate highway
- The interstate highway is located within the township officer's jurisdiction
- There is a permanent access point on and off the interstate highway located within the jurisdiction and open to the public

I want to underscore that this legislation is permissive, with many excellent guardrails, and also includes a provision where the township trustees may revoke the previously granted authority through a resolution.

Furthermore, I would like to underscore that this bill is not about writing tickets and padding the coffers of our townships. The intent of traffic stops is to keep our citizens safe through education, a change of behaviors, or to make a motorist aware of a potential infraction. So yes, that might involve a verbal or written warning, or at times a citation.

The Ohio Revised Code, section 4513.35, covers the disposition of fines. Township officers, unlike city or village officers, may only write citations under the Ohio Revised Code. Per the aforementioned section, any potential speed fines collected shall be paid into the county treasury to the credit of the fund for the maintenance and repair of the highways within that county.

As you are aware from testimony during the last several weeks from Colonel Richard S. Fambro, the Ohio State Highway Patrol's 19th Superintendent, the Patrol as of today is down nearly 75 troopers. This legislation has taken on additional significance given the reduced number of troopers on our interstates.

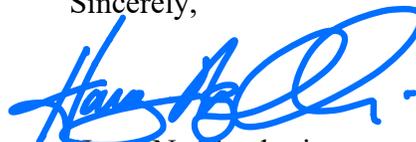
During the colonel's testimony before the House Finance Committee and the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, I had the opportunity to ask about his thoughts on this proposed legislation. He said, in part,

"...force multipliers are always critical to what we do. I can tell you from having the responsibility of running the statewide operations for our criminal interdiction efforts that we work very well with our partners, especially in the interdiction realm. It's a very close-knit community and cadre of professionals that share their craft and I know for a fact that you are very passionate about that and I know that we have worked with many of those agencies in your district very closely, not on just interdiction things, but in training and doing the job every day. So, yes sir, we do work very well collaboratively and it would assist."

As some of you may know, during the previous General Assembly, I carried this same bill, then known as House Bill 539. It passed out of committee unanimously twice, and received favorable bipartisan support passing the full House 73-20. During the entire process we had no opponent testimony.

In closing, thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 206, a public safety bill that will help in protecting Ohioans and bring more coordination among the interested parties as mentioned. Thank you for your earnest consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions of the committee.

Sincerely,



Haraz N. Ghanbari

Member of the Ohio House of Representatives