

## **Testimony in Support of HB 519**

**from**

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**Resident of Grove City, Ohio**

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. I would also like to thank Representative Laura Lanese for reaching out to me regarding my experience with the Regional Income Tax Agency (RITA) and asking me to testify here today.

I first became aware of RITA about a year and a half after I retired from the Army. Born and raised in Grove City, I maintained my parents address on Addison Drive in Grove City as my permanent address during my time in service. I was diligent in ensuring our taxes were filed on time every year regardless of our location. This includes in 2008 when I filed my taxes while sitting behind my desk at the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division Headquarters in Tikrit, Iraq. I mention this to set the stage for what I was soon to experience with RITA.

My wife Pam and I decided to move back to Grove City when I retired from the Army because it was close to family, familiar, and a soft place to land after our lengthy time serving abroad. We purchased our home, sight unseen, near the Grove City Town Center. Pam, our daughter, and three dogs moved back from Japan at the beginning of March 2017. I did not arrive until mid-July as I had to finish my tour. I officially retired from the Army on 30 September 2017. Therefore, all of my pay from being overseas was not taxed by the State of Ohio as well as my Army retirement income. In early 2018 I filed my 2017 federal and state income taxes and thought no more of it. I had fulfilled my civic obligation to file my taxes.

Flash forward to the end of 2018/early 2019 timeframe, I saw a few envelopes come to our house from some company I had never heard of that were addressed separately to my wife and I. With the inordinate amount of junk mail we receive on a daily basis I discarded them and thought it was just another attempt to get me to buy something or refinance my house. This happened a few more times over the next couple years and, as I said previously, I thought it was junk mail. Then in February 2021 I saw a Facebook post from another citizen in Grove City asking if anyone else was getting these bills from RITA. At that time, I just so happened to look through my mail and see a couple of envelopes with the RITA logo as a return address. When I opened them I was shocked.

I opened the envelopes from RITA to see that I was being assessed several hundred dollars in late fees and fines from an organization I had never heard of before. I had to figure out what this organization was and why they thought I owed them money. At the same time, I

tagged my local councilman and Representative Lanese in the original Facebook post that drew my attention. In that post I asked if they knew about this organization and how they were, in my words, fleecing taxpayers. I then set out to rectify what I thought was a huge mistake and rid myself of these fines.

It was not easy. It took multiple phone calls and a lot of time to get this fixed. I had calls with the point of contact listed on the letters from RITA who then referred me to the Grove City Tax Administrator Mr. Donnelly. To make a long story short, I was eventually able to get a tax penalty abatement from Grove City once I filed my overdue RITA returns. According to Mr. Donnelly, he would do a one-time abatement of all late fees and that any future late penalties would not be waived.

The amount of my abatement was close to \$500 and I owed the City of Grove City exactly \$0. Let that sink in. Fined \$500 on a tax balance of zero. My only fault was not knowing RITA existed and not filing a return.

All the while I kept thinking and asking myself why is this organization necessary. The technology that exists today is extraordinary. We can launch people into space for an afternoon trip and return them safely to earth, have items delivered to our house at a moment's notice with a phone app, and communicate with people all over the world from the palm of our hands. One would think the same organization that has access to see if I filed my federal and state tax returns, to in turn send me a notice stating I did not file a return with them, would also be able to leverage technology to see if I owed any city tax and do so without having to contact me and request paperwork. I'm still asking myself that question.

Eventually, I posted what I had learned about RITA and the process to the Grove City Connect page on Facebook. I wanted to make other citizens aware of RITA and the process to get an abatement of the fines. I figured I was probably not the only one. The post quickly garnered several dozen shares and likes. I also posted the office phone numbers of Representative Lanese and State Senator Kunze that other constituents might contact them to get this fixed.

The bill before you in this committee is a step toward fixing issues tax payers experience with a government funded organization...an organization you as elected officials authorized. By definition fleecing is "obtaining a great deal of money from someone typically by overcharging or swindling them." In my opinion this is exactly what is happening at RITA under current laws and regulations. By moving this bill forward and passing it into law it will severely restrict RITA's ability to create an additional financial burden to taxpayers at the hands of the government.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to speak before this committee today. I sincerely hope this bill makes it out of your committee and eventually becomes law. It will have an immediate and positive impact for citizens throughout our great state.