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State Senator Kristina Roegner

Ohio's 27th Senate District

Sponsor Testimony

Senate Bill 4

Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

January 26, 2021

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 4, which ensures that the personal, confidential information of emergency service communications specialists, commonly known as 911 operators, is protected under the State Public Records Law. This legislation unanimously passed both the Senate and Senate Judiciary Committee last General Assembly. The bill also passed the Ohio House, but did not reach concurrence due to other, unrelated provisions that were added to the bill.

About three years ago, it was brought to my attention that emergency service telecommunicators are at times subject to threats of retaliation due to the intrinsic responsibilities of their occupation. For example, a 2017 incident involving City of Euclid police officers was highlighted on ABC, CBS, and NBC, along with cable news networks. As citizens from across the country learned of the incident, they sought out a channel to vent their frustration. Many chose to direct their words, often threatening in manner, at the City of Euclid 911 line where emergency telecommunication services are contracted to the Chagrin Valley Dispatch. Despite the aforementioned telecommunicators working for a regional dispatch and not

being directly employed by the City of Euclid, callers hurled threats of harm and death upon them and their families. The threats caused telecommunicators to fear that a simple public records request could expose their personal home address putting them and their families at risk.

The legislation I am proposing will provide an additional layer of protection for these important individuals, who provide a critical role in ensuring the safety of our society, by aligning the Public Records Law governing their profession with the protections currently available to those in similar occupations.

Expanded upon passage of House Bill 341 of the 132nd General Assembly, Ohio Revised Code Section 149.43 currently exempts certain categories of personal information belonging to individuals classified as “designated public service workers” from the Public Records Law. The occupations that qualify for the exemption generally involve positions where the individual’s official occupational responsibilities uniquely subject them to potential retaliation. Individuals employed as peace officers, parole officers, probation officers, correctional employees, emergency medical technicians, firefighters, prosecuting attorneys, and judges, among others, currently enjoy these protections from the Public Records Law.

This legislation simply expands this protection to encompass individuals who are employed as emergency service telecommunicators. The bill will not modify the personal information that is exempted, instead granting the *identical* protections that are currently available to “designated public service workers” under O.R.C. 149.43 to emergency service telecommunicators.

I would also like to note that during the legislative process in the last General Assembly, the Ohio National Guard (ONG) requested an amendment to this legislation to protect National Guard members who are serving in the field of remotely piloted aircraft. This amendment was included at the request of the ONG due to reports of terrorist groups targeting these men and women because of their important role in preserving our nation's safety and security. I am strongly supportive of this language and believe it is consistent with the premise of the bill, which is that public servants should be protected as much as possible from personal threats to their own safety, or to their family's safety and well-being, because of their important work in the line of duty.

This legislation had no opponent testimony during the last General Assembly, and had the support of the Ohio National Guard, the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association, the Fraternal Order of Police, and the Ohio News Media Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 4. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.