

Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 31.

My name is Valerie Fatica. I am a lifelong Ohioan and lifelong person with a disability. I am a voter, a homeowner, and a practicing attorney in the State of Ohio. I have been a licensed driver for over 18 years.

Everywhere I go, I seek out the designated accessible parking spaces. For me, there are a couple reasons why these spots are necessary. First, I need a little extra room to enter and exit my vehicle. I drive a minivan and I have an arm that lifts my wheelchair in and out of the passenger side door. The adjacent access aisle on accessible spaces provides the extra room that I need. Frequently when I have to park in regular spots, I get parked in and am unable to access my vehicle. This either requires a long wait for the adjacent driver to move, or at times I have even crawled from my wheelchair to my vehicle, backed out a little bit, and crawled back to my wheelchair in a dirty parking lot in order to get my wheelchair back in my vehicle.

Second, the ADA Architectural Guidelines require that designated accessible parking spaces be located on the shortest accessible route to the building entrance. While this is helpful for those who may have difficulty ambulating or get tired from walking or pushing long distances, for me there's a reason you may not have thought about. My height in my wheelchair is under four feet tall. If I have to park far away, I am rolling behind SUVs and trucks with drivers that cannot see me out of their back window. This makes for a dangerous situation. Every time I park far away, my eyes check each vehicle I pass for brake lights, exhaust, or people in the driver's seat. When I have someone with me, I ask that they walk directly beside me for visibility purposes in the parking lot. As you can imagine, this situation is made all the more dangerous when it is dark out and when I am loaded down with bags of groceries.

Illegal parking is rampant. Whether it's a vehicle without a handicap placard or plate, a driver in an idling vehicle waiting for someone inside, or a vehicle (with or without a handicap placard/plate) parking in the access aisles. If it's not a vehicle blocking access aisles, I have seen

dumpsters, port-a-pottys, or fire hydrants located in the access aisles. I invite you all to take a trip to your local Wal-Mart and take a look at the accessible parking. I use Wal-Mart because every Wal-Mart I have seen has perfectly compliant designated accessible parking that is well-maintained, but illegal parking there is horrible.

The proposed legislation will increase the consequences for parking illegally, allow for alternate enforcement methods, and end the common defenses used in court about the signage not being 100% compliant.

I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation. Thank you all for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.