

Senate Bill 255— Supporting Testimony May 17th, 2022 Senator Nickie J. Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present my written testimony concerning Senate Bill 255

Thank you for allowing the opportunity for Wayne to be remembered and honored. Please let me share with you a little glimpse of what life was like before Wayne was killed. At the time of Wayne's death we had been married for 8 years. He truly was my best friend and an amazing husband and father and he was a man of great faith. Our oldest son Justin – was 5 years old. He was getting ready for kindergarten. Gabrielle was 4 years old. We were preparing her for pre-school. Nicholas was 2 years old. He was curious and loved to explore the world around him. The summer was supposed to focus on learning to ride bikes, learning to tie shoes, and getting Nicholas out of diapers. Wayne was employed with the Cleveland Division of Police for 6 years. He really believed he was making a difference in the areas he worked. He was a proud police officer!!! And I was proud of him and his incredible work ethic and passion to get really bad people off the streets of Cleveland. We, like other police families, recognize the day they walked out of the academy they vowed they would lay down their lives for you, for their community, if the time ever came. We live with the fear that our officers may not come home from their shift. We pray a lot for their safety and good health. A quiet prayer as Wayne would walk out the door to do the job he was driven to do was "GOD PLEASE KEEP HIM SAFE".

June 25, 2000 started out very ordinary. I woke to the sound of the shower running. I jumped out of bed thinking I didn't make Wayne's lunch yet. It was early, we stumbled around each other in the kitchen. As he left for work he asked me if he could get the newspaper for me so I could read it before the children woke up. He handed me the paper, gathered his things, gave me a kiss and said "See you later" and left. The last thing he did for me was get the paper – Ironic that the next day's headlines would be about the search for the man that killed him.

I had no idea that was the final kiss we would share; that in a few hours I would get a knock on my door that would forever change my and my children's lives; that I would leave my house in an unmarked police car with three strangers to be rushed to the hospital; that I would be donating my husband's organs that day, that I would be trying to memorize him as he lay in the hospital bed. That day holds my two worst experiences – Walking away from Wayne in the hospital for the last time, and telling my children Daddy was hurt so bad, he went to heaven and wasn't coming home.

In a moment my identity changed - I was now a widow, a single parent and a survivor. Very private people were grieving publicly. I was forced to go on without my best friend, the person that I was supposed to grow old with, and without a witness to my life. But what is worse, is that my children lost their father. I know the type of father he wanted to be for his children-the qualities he had I can't duplicate. The thought of living life without Wayne was inconceivably painful.

Wayne was shot in the face and killed during a traffic stop. The man that killed him was a violent fugitive on the run and didn't want to go back to prison. The perpetrator had a long criminal history. Over the years DNA linked him to many rape cases. Wayne was just one of the many officers that gave his life serving and protecting the communities in which we live.

Although saying goodbye to Wayne was very difficult, I try to focus on how Wayne's legacy lives on. I went back to school to be a social worker for an agency called Frontline Service. I am part of a Traumatic Loss response Team. Ironically, I am embedded in the Cleveland Police Homicide Unit. I am the liaison between homicide victim's families and detectives. Our son, Justin, is a proud member of the Cleveland Division of Fire. He wears his father's badge number! Badge #1338 continues to impact the city of Cleveland! Our daughter, Gabrielle, is a social worker. She is a school counselor. Our youngest son, Nicholas, works for the Cleveland FBI. I am so proud that all of our children chose careers focusing on service of others just like their dad.

As a result how Wayne died, Marshal Pete Elliott created the Northern Ohio Violent Fugitive Task Force. Since Wayne's death the Violent Fugitive task force has arrested over 40,000 violent offenders and removed them off our streets. I am grateful for the people that I have met as a result of what happened and are who I now call friends. I have been honored to reach out to line of duty death survivors that have come after me and helped departments that have tragically lost officers.

In addition, I started a scholarship in Wayne's memory at St. Ignatius High School to help with tuition expenses for young men who have parents that chose the safety forces as a career. St. Ignatius High School was a place Wayne attended with pride. It was his dream that his son's would be able to follow his legacy and attend the same school that he was so fond of. Fr. Kesicki, the former President of St. Ignatius High School, once said our sons will learn a lot about their father from walking the same halls he did when he attended here. That dream became a reality, both Justin and Nicholas graduated from St. Ignatius. A memorial sign near the grounds of St. Ignatius High School would be a tribute to the life and memory of my husband Wayne.

Thank you so much for considering him for this honor and remembering the family he left behind.