**Before the House State and Local Government Committee**

**House Bill 217 –Solemnize Marriage: Broaden**

**Sponsor Testimony by Representative Michael J. Skindell**

**May 22, 2019**

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 217. I have previously introduced this bill in the 131st and 132nd General Assemblies. The goal of H.B. 217 is to broaden the category of those who may solemnize marriages in the state.

Many people who seek to get married are not affiliated with a church or religious organization. This legislation will provide convenience to citizens seeking only a civil marriage in that they would not be limited in going through the various public officials, such as judges or mayors, who are currently authorized to solemnize marriages.

Under current law, those who may solemnize marriages in Ohio are (1) an ordained or licensed minister of any religious society or congregation in Ohio, (2) a county court judge, (3) a municipal court judge, (4) a probate judge (in the county, only), (5) the mayor of a municipal corporation in any county in which the municipal corporation is wholly or partly located, (6) the Superintendent of the State School for the Deaf, and (7) any religious society in conformity with the rules of its church.

With regards to the current provision that ordained or licensed ministers can perform these marriages, an Ohioan can currently become an ordained minister “fast and easy” and, in some cases, “completely free” through the online application processes of the Universal Life Church, Open Ministries, the United National Ministry or other ministries. You can also acquire a clergy badge online once your online application has been approved.

This legislation provides that any other person who has registered to solemnize marriages with the Ohio Secretary of State may also do so. Once a person wishing to perform a marriage registers with the Secretary of State, he or she will be issued a license to perform these ceremonies. This allows for greater freedom and flexibility for

those wishing to be married by someone who is not affiliated with a church or religious community or those who do not become an online minister.

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for your consideration of H.B. 217. I would be happy to answer any questions relating to this legislation.