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Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 61
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Senate Judiciary Committee

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 61, which exempts forensic psychologists and mental health evaluation providers from public records requests.

During the 132nd General Assembly, this issue was brought to my attention by one of my constituents who is a forensic psychologist. She moved from Virginia to Ohio a few years ago and was shocked to see how open our public records laws were compared to other states. While this level of transparency is important, the safety of those in high risk occupations must be taken into consideration. That is why we chose to introduce House Bill 406 in the 132nd General Assembly, which added the aforementioned professions to the exempted list.

House Bill 406 also contained a provision that would have consolidated the list of exempted professions into the term "designated public service worker." This provision was also included in HB 341, which exempted judges' personal information from public records requests and which passed the General Assembly last year and is now part of Ohio law. House Bill 61 simply includes forensic psychologists and mental health evaluation providers in the list of exempted professions.

Forensic psychologists and mental health evaluation providers have frequent interactions with criminals and oftentimes their evaluations are the impetus behind the sentencing of an individual. This makes these professionals and their families vulnerable to retaliation. In Ohio, we currently exempt peace officers, prosecutors, judges, and a multitude of other occupations from the public records law. It only makes sense to add forensic psychologists and mental health evaluation providers to the list. That is why the bill received unanimous support in the House just eight months ago.

Before introducing HB 406, we held an interested party meeting that included the Ohio News Media Association, among others, and we were met with no opposition. This simple piece of legislation will help protect those who, unfortunately, may be subject to violence in the course of their duties. Just last year after the introduction of our bill, the forensic psychologist in the Jon Benet Ramsey murder, who had continued to work on other high-profile cases, was murdered.

This legislation passed the House with a vote of 93-1 in March of this year. I'd be happy to answer any questions from the committee.