



Beryl Love
Executive Editor
The Cincinnati Enquirer
USA TODAY Network Ohio

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Good morning Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Beryl Love and I am the Executive Editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer and State Editor for the USA TODAY Network Ohio. I am here today in support of Senate Bill 215, the Ohio Citizen Participation Act, which would expedite the process for the dismissal of meritless lawsuits against individuals trying to exercise their right to free speech.

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SB 215 would enact protections against strategic lawsuits aimed at preventing public participation so that plaintiffs are discouraged from filing defamation lawsuits for the sole purpose of intimidating citizens and chilling free speech. SB 215 does not change existing libel and slander laws. It simply creates a new process to expedite the review and resolution for cases involving protected, first amendment free speech. More than 30 states have already enacted similar legislation.

While the necessary protections provided in SB 215 are important to the media, such cases often involve everyday citizens who exercise their first amendment right to speak out. For example, there is a pending case in Cleveland in which a local builder is suing its customers and their attorney to prevent them from commenting on his business practices. We have seen abusers suing their domestic violence victims to stop them from speaking out. Such lawsuits – and the costs of defending them – discourage public participation in controversial matters. Few citizens and organizations are willing or able to bear the cost and stress.

The Cincinnati Enquirer is a proud member of a broad coalition of organizations supporting this measure, and we ask for your support of SB 215. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.