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December 2, 2020

Chairman Eklund and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for Senate Bill 359 on behalf of the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association.

Senate Bill 359 enhances protections for Ohio's first responders and their families. While we wish this legislation were not necessary, the reality is that our jobs as emergency personnel puts us in the public eye regularly and therefore susceptible to the ill-will of an individual who may be looking to target the personnel responding to that emergency.

Our response to an emergent event within a community is often covered by the local press and can provide details about our response that an individual without fire/EMS training may disagree with. In particular, for large-scale emergencies this coverage can include quotes and other personally identifying information that can be used by an individual in a dangerous way. Senate Bill 359 would provide us with greater protections to deter menacing, assault, and other harmful action against us and our families.

Additionally, Senate Bill 359 includes language that would strengthen the ramifications for arson when used to endanger a first responder or their family. OFCA supports this language given the widespread harm that arson can have, not only on the targeted individual, but to the surrounding community as well as the firefighters working to contain and extinguish the fire.

Ultimately, OFCA believes this legislation will help protect our state's first responders as we continue to serve in the name of public safety. We appreciate Senator Schaffer's leadership on this legislation and urge your support.

Respectfully,

Steve Agenbroad
OFCA Legislative Committee, Chair