



Genoa Township Police Department

6921 Big Walnut Rd. Galena, Ohio 43021

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Ohio House of Representatives
Criminal Justice Committee
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Written Testimony in Support of HB 462

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 462 which would prohibit the offense of "Swatting."

As we near the end of National Law Enforcement Memorial Week, it is evident that police officers across this great country face various dangers every day of the week. Some of these dangers are intentional acts, while others may be caused by volatile arguments, impaired drivers, or violent criminals. The dangers they face daily are too many to list. However, the act of "Swatting", simply is a callous, senseless, and extremely difficult danger to combat.

When law enforcement receives a call that involves weapons and violence, tactics play a vital role in not only trying to ensure our safety but also the public or the victims. Without a shadow of a doubt if you ask any officer if they would run into a situation involving someone with a weapon and the answer would be yes. That is what we do, it is built into our character to help others. However with "swatting calls", we must try to slow down and assess the situation, which is extremely difficult. Have you ever had to make split-second decisions, that have life and death consequences? These are the challenges officers face daily. And to have someone intentionally fabricate a call in a manner to try and elicit such responses from law enforcement is a callous, calculated, and extremely dangerous act.

When examining how dangerous these calls can be, one must also think of how these innocent people must feel. We have probably heard the stories of celebrities, authors sports figures, getting "swatted". Thankfully the results ended peacefully. However, these calls do not always end the way we would hope. In 2017 the family of Andrew Finch in Wichita, Kansas was forever changed. They were the victim of a "swatting call". The caller alleged that the father was holding people hostage inside their home, that he had poured gasoline all over the house, and taunted the police. Andrew had heard a noise and stepped outside to see what was going on. Officers stated that he came onto the porch and eventually was



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shot by police. This is such a tragic and preventable event. Often times though, we thank but that doesn't occur here.

Genoa Township Police serves a population of almost 28,000 residents in a 21.5 square mile area just northeast of Columbus. It is a nice bedroom community with a relatively low crime rate, and certainly, we do not experience random acts of violence. However, crime has no jurisdictional limits. In 2018, multiple officers were dispatched to an address in our township on a strange call. The call was from a strange number and stated the suspect (name not provided as he was not a suspect) was holding his family hostage and wanted \$5,000. Officer arrived on the scene quickly but discovered the parents were outside. They quickly discovered that what the caller had stated did not appear to be occurring. Just a short few months later in 2019, once again officers were dispatched to this address on a suicide attempt. The caller once again referenced the same person and stated he was going to either cut or shoot himself. Officers responded to the scene while taking into consideration the recent call history there. Again, they discovered this was not an actual call to the address. Both these calls were handled safely, and the results were acceptable. There were only minor disruptions to the family affected, although this was the second time they were "swatted".

Fast forward to 2021, our agency received a call from an individual who had not yet identified himself. He had called the wrong agency and got transferred to our dispatch center. He wanted to report a domestic. He stated that he and his wife had been arguing a lot and he has a gun. He asked the police to hurry up and get there because he didn't want to have to shoot her. The dispatcher was asking him to secure the weapon since no one was in danger. The caller stopped responding and before hanging up, the dispatcher could hear what sounded like possible gunshots. This is the information the officers initially had to assess the call. They did what any officer should do, they assessed upon arrival, began setting up a perimeter, called for additional units to respond, and immediately requested the tactical team and negotiator units. They stated the house appeared dark and they could not hear any yelling or screaming that indicated violence was occurring. They began making announcements over the PA to try and contact anyone inside. Inside the home, a wife and mother of a newborn had been up to feed their child. She heard the noise outside and woke her husband up. He went to the front door to see what was happening. Once there, he was greeted by 5-6 officers with weapons drawn. They gave commands for him to exit the house and lay down in the yard. Thankfully he did comply as asked and he was handcuffed without any issues. Around this time also, his wife with a newborn in her arms came to the front door. She was shaken seeing what was occurring. After briefly discussing



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with her why they were there, it was clear this too was a "swatting call". (Please listen to the actual call to the dispatcher)

The above scenario like so many others could have played out so differently. What if the husband had not realized they were police? What if he grabbed a weapon to try and protect his wife and newborn! Or maybe, because he had woken up, he wasn't doing exactly what the officers said. In these situations, little mistakes can have huge consequences. There needs to be more accountability and punishment for committing such acts. As you have heard, it puts the police and public at increased risk for unimaginable harm. I encourage you to send the message that "swatting" will not be tolerated and punished accordingly in the Great State of Ohio! That's exactly what supporting HB 462 will do.

I would like to thank the committee for their time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich Lyon" followed by a stylized flourish and the number "605".

Lieutenant Rich Lyon, CLEE
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