



**State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 134 Sponsor Testimony
Representative Thomas West
Legislation to Address Peace Officer Training and Resources
December 7th, 2022**

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, and Ranking Member Kelly and all members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 134, which regards peace officer training and resources.

The reality that African-Americans are disproportionately targeted and brutalized by police officers is clearly supported by statistics. According to a Gallup Poll, more than half of Americans polled believed that police actively engage in the practice of racial profiling and, more significantly, 81 percent of them said they disapprove of the practice.

Even more alarming is data recently collected by the Washington Post, which indicates that the rate at which African-Americans are killed by police is more than twice as high as the rate for White Americans. Further, an overwhelming majority of people shot and killed by police are male — over 95 percent, and more than half the victims

are between 20 and 40 years old. It is undeniable that racial profiling and police brutality are critical issues that we must address to protect all Ohioans, especially those from racial minority groups. HB 134 is common-sense legislation that aims to address an obvious flaw in our criminal justice system.

This legislation includes the following measures to combat police brutality:

- Requires peace officers to receive training in de-escalation techniques, implicit bias, procedural justice, mental health issues, and first aid and critical injuries to obtain certification – and on a continuing basis to maintain certification – and dictates parameters for and scope of the required training.
- Requires peace officers to receive information annually regarding mental health support and resources available for peace officers.
- Requires the Attorney General to adopt rules under the Administrative Procedure Act to effectuate the required training and the dissemination of mental health related information to peace officers.

- Appropriates \$28 million in FY 2022 from the General Revenue Fund to the Law Enforcement Assistance Fund to reimburse law enforcement agencies for the cost of the required training.

House Bill 134 is an incredible piece of legislation that will protect both our peace officers and Ohioans in confrontation and prevent further escalation. This bill will require peace officers to successfully complete training on de-escalation techniques, implicit bias, procedural justice, mental health issues, and first aid and critical injuries. A peace officer is a civil officer whose duty it is to preserve the public peace. Similar to our police officers, our peace officers should be trained in the same protocols to ensure diligence, safety, and precaution are taken when in an altercation with a civilian.

Annual training on mental health and enforcing de-escalation techniques when possible will help keep both our officers and civilians safe. It is hard to recognize mental health symptoms when you are not knowledgeable on how to identify them. Moreover, it is even harder to know how to intervene safely when someone is in a mental health crisis without proper training. It should always be the goal of our officers to avoid escalating situations that lead to violence. It

is our duty to employ them with the initial training and annual continuing training to keep Ohio's communities safer.

Additionally, a crucial aspect of this new curriculum is implicit bias and explicit bias, cultural competency, and the historical intersection of race and policing. Every year, my office fields countless calls and emails from Ohioans, even outside my district, who have faced discrimination and bias from an Ohio officer. The goal of all of our officer should be to provide a positive point of contact with community members to increase trust and reduce conflicts.

We must come together to create common-sense, proactive solutions to these problems. Public safety and the wellbeing of Ohio communities is not a partisan issue, and I hope we can work together to address this crisis.

Ohio must be proactive in preventing escalation and discrimination in interactions between peace officers and civilians. By offering techniques that provide all peace officers with awareness and recognition of physical and mental disabilities, mental health issues, and substance abuse issues with an emphasis on communication strategies, and training simultaneously in teams on de-escalation and use of force to improve group dynamics and diminish excessive use

of force during critical incidents; we are ensuring all precautions are being taken to keep all parties involved safe.

It is critical that we take action to do whatever necessary to ensure the health and wellness of all Ohioans, civilians and officers alike, so we urge that you pass H.B. 134. Thank you again for your time and attention, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.