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Committees:

- Judiciary – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Veterans & Public Safety – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Government Oversight and Reform
- Health
- Insurance
- Joint Medicaid Oversight
- Joint Legislative Ethics

Government Oversight and Reform
Senator Roegner, Chair
Sponsor Testimony on Senate Bill 179
Senator Cecil Thomas
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 179. This legislation requires that committees accept virtual testimony.

As you all know, the primary means Ohioans have to comment on a bill is committee testimony. This testimony can be in-person or, alternatively, written. While many residents of Ohio choose to avail themselves of both options, each has significant drawbacks.

I will start with in-person testimony. Providing in-person testimony requires Ohioans to take time off from work, travel to Columbus, wait for committee to begin, and finally drive back home. While this is feasible for legislators and advocates who conduct business in this building, many Ohioans do not have the option of missing a half-day or full day of work. They cannot afford the loss of wages or salary for a missed day. Assuming one can take time off, Ohioans still have to have a mode of transport that allows them to travel from the corners of the state. A constituent in my district, for example, has to find transportation for the three-hour round trip to provide testimony that may last a few short minutes.

I recognize, however, that in-person testimony is not the only method available for witnesses to share their views. Written testimony is frequently utilized by those who cannot testify in person. This alternative, of course, has its own unique drawbacks. For one, it does not allow for live questioning of witnesses by committee members. This is often the most crucial component of our hearings because it allows us to elicit feedback and clarify issues we are considering.

I am sponsoring this bill to create a third option for testimony that does not suffer from these drawbacks. A virtual testimony alternative allows Ohioans to testify from work or home without having to take the day off and make the trek to Columbus. Further, a virtual alternative is superior to written because it permits live questioning when legislators need explanations of issues raised during testimony.

Critics of virtual testimony stress the logistical challenges the General Assembly might face if this method is adopted. It is important to note that legislative committees and government work groups have met virtually in the past. Controlling Board, in fact, has frequently accommodated witnesses by allowing virtual testimony. It is vital we replicate this in other committees and make the committee process more accommodating to all Ohioans.

I would like to thank Chair Roegner, and all committee members for allowing me to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 179. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions.