

Good afternoon, House Committee,

Thank you for allowing my proponent testimony for House Bill 265.

I am Ryan Sprunger, I currently work as a fire inspector and investigator. I have been in the fire service for several years now. I come from a firefighter family, my grandfather was a firefighter for 55 years and 45 of those serving as the fire chief. My father and cousin were firefighters, as well as 4 of my in-laws that are currently serving. In 2022, I was awarded the Presidential Medal of Valor by President Joe Biden at the White House. I was also recognized by this House of Representatives for my life-saving measures, risking my own life to save several others.

Believe it or not, though, the most difficult part of the fire service or any public safety service, is not risking our lives for others, it is the variety of threats that we face trying to protect ourselves and our families. Several of these threats is what Bill 265 aims to protect. Granting legal protection against public record requests for work schedules is crucial to safeguarding the security of our communities as well as personal information such as the location of our residence. By making this information readily available, we inadvertently expose our first responders to potential threats from individuals with malicious intent. After giving up so much to help others, isn't it time to look out for those who give up so much?

First responders endure enough stress of the job, that we do not need additional stressors. Statistics show that first responders have a higher percentage of suicides than the average citizen. These dedicated professionals often work long hours under stressful conditions, sacrificing personal time with family and friends. Exposing their work schedules publicly can further infringe upon their private lives, leading to increased stress levels and potentially compromising their mental health. This bill helps alleviate undue stresses needed upon first responders and public employees.

If first responders fear that their schedules will be made public, it may discourage them from taking on additional shifts or overtime hours when needed most. This could result in understaffed emergency services and delayed responses during critical situations. Trying to find enough first responders to fill jobs is already becoming a difficult task, we do not need more barriers to keep someone from filling one of the vacancies. It is important to acknowledge that not all aspects of government operations need complete transparency. Certain sensitive information should remain confidential in order to ensure effective functionality and protect those who serve on the front lines of emergencies.

My position as a fire inspector and investigator leads me to deal closely with community members and business owners. In this day and age, it is more difficult to be able to feel safe throughout our communities due to many factors. The role I serve as a fire inspector is to issue violations, citations, and assess fees to business owners. As a fire investigator, it is my role to determine the origin & cause of a fire as well as determine if the fire was intentionally set and ultimately to determine if someone may have purposefully set the fire.

Dealing with potential arsonists and other disgruntled business owners creates a safety concern for myself and our families. It should be the utmost responsibility to protect our first responders and their families if these potential groups of people know our schedules they will then subsequently know when we are either at home, not home, away on vacation, when our families are home alone, and so on. The way the current laws read, anyone can have access to our schedules, and our personal information such as our location of residence, jeopardizing the safety of our families.

In conclusion, granting legal protection against public record requests for first responders' work schedules strikes a necessary balance between transparency and safeguarding the security and privacy concerns of these dedicated professionals. By doing so, we can ensure that our communities remain safe, our first responders' well-being is prioritized, and our emergency response system operates efficiently and effectively.

Thank you for your time, it is much appreciated, and I am open for any questions their may be.