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Transportation and Public Safety

Kevin D. Miller  
State Representative

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 536 which would make seat belt violations a primary offense.

This bill is designed to reduce the severity of injuries and loss of life suffered as a result of traffic crashes. This is accomplished by increasing compliance with Ohio's current mandatory seat belt law by making violations a primary offense. Simply put, the threat of being pulled over and issued a citation for not wearing your belt has proven to increase compliance in states around the county. Increasing usage rates translates directly to reduced injuries and lives saved. Passage of this legislation would add Ohio to the list of 34 other states who have primary seat belt laws including 4 of our 5 neighboring states.

In 2022, Ohio's usage rate was right around 80% which makes us the 10<sup>th</sup> lowest state in the nation and well below the national average of 91.6%. We've got to do better because on average 61% of all traffic fatalities and 14% of traffic injuries in Ohio occur when the victim is not wearing their seat belt.

During my tenure with the Highway Patrol, I personally observed countless injuries and numerous traffic fatalities that were a direct result of someone not wearing their seat belt. I investigated hundreds of crashes where I witnessed vehicles mangled but lives saved because of

a belt. Conversely, I saw numerous other cases where a moderate crash led to a fatality because someone was not restrained. I will tell you making a death notification was never easy, but it was much more difficult when the conversation turned to the specifics of the crash. Often a victim's family would ask if their loved one was buckled in. I dreaded that question because if they were not I knew the next question coming was always do you believe they would have survived if they were belted in? In far too many cases the answer was "yes."

In closing, statistics tell us wearing a seat belt can reduce your risk of fatal injury by 45% and reduce the risk of injury by 50%. We know states across the country with primary seat belt laws see higher usage rates. This means making Ohio's seatbelt law a primary offense will translate to a greater seat belt compliance which will in turn save lives and reduce injuries.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this crucial and live saving bill and we are happy to answer any questions the committee might have.