



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

111 Liberty St., Suite 100
Columbus, Ohio 43215
www.morpc.org

**House Bill 536
Proponent Testimony
June 25, 2024
Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
William Murdock, Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 536. My name is William Murdock, I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC).

MORPC is a regional planning organization and regional council representing more than 85 local governments and partner organizations across 15 Central Ohio counties. Our communities span urban, suburban, and rural areas, comprising a broad cross-section of Ohioans. In addition to serving as both a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), we also provide a variety of programs and services for our members related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic and community development.

MORPC was proud to serve on the Ohio Safety Belt Task Force; a committee of more than 30 experts convened by the Ohio Department of Public Safety to study the effectiveness of safety belt laws and publish recommendations. In May, the final report was submitted to the Governor laying out these recommendations and supporting data.

Traffic crash data have shown an alarming increase in traffic fatalities in recent years. While increased speeds associated with the pandemic years are a factor, we have also noticed a decline in safety belt use in the same time period, further exacerbating this trend. In 2022, Ohio's safety belt usage was the 10th lowest in the country, at roughly 81 percent – the lowest in a decade. According to the Ohio Department of Public Safety, teens and young adults in particular are showing the lowest rates among Ohio drivers.


As you have heard from other testimony before this committee, safety belt use makes a considerable difference in the survivability of traffic crashes. According to the Ohio State Highway Patrol, 61 percent of motorists killed in traffic crashes between 2019 and 2021 were not wearing an available safety belt. This accounts for more than 1,500 deaths – many of which could have been prevented.

William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director

Chris Amorose Grooms
Chair

Michelle Crandall
Vice Chair

Ben Kessler
Secretary



MORPC therefore strongly supports the passage of House Bill 536. This additional layer of enforcement will ensure that more lives are saved on our roadways, more drivers develop safe habits for themselves and their families, and more of our fellow Ohioans arrive safely at their destinations.

However, we also echo the concerns of racial bias that have been raised in this committee, and we urge you to add language requiring collection, reporting, and publication of traffic stop data to make transparent any disproportionate enforcement against Ohioans of color. Safety for Ohioans should not come at the cost of discrimination, and all efforts should be made to ensure that the law is applied fairly. The first step in addressing this concern is data collection. We support a requirement that for all traffic stops – not only those for which a citation is issued – the race of the offender be recorded and reported to the Ohio Department of Public Safety. We further support the publication of aggregate data to inform public policy going forward.

Chair Abrams and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 536. Please do not hesitate to contact me or a member of our government affairs team with any questions.

