



Ohio Game Protectors Association

House Finance Committee
Testimony on House Bill 33
4/18/2023

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Dan Schneider, and I am a hunter and a wildlife enthusiast. I represent the Ohio Game Protectors Association, a non-profit group supporting wildlife enforcement officers in Ohio. I retired from the Division of Wildlife as a commissioned wildlife officer overseeing Statewide operations. In my career, I was responsible for enforcing the rules and regulations on all wildlife species, including bald eagles and Ohio's world-class deer herd. I am testifying today to ask you to remove the language diminishing wildlife officers authority.

These proposed changes to requiring a warrant to make an arrest will have a profound impact on both the safety of the public and the officers. I have witnessed multiple incidents where wildlife officers risked their lives to protect our wildlife resources. The changes to the law would not allow a wildlife officer, who is a commissioned Peace Officer, to arrest a violent suspect that was physically harming them without first obtaining a warrant. How can a body that has repeatedly supported law enforcement allow such a change? Wildlife officers would be the only Ohio Peace Officers prohibited from making arrests without a warrant. This would include enforcing drug laws in wildlife areas and state parks.

Another proposed change is limiting the ability to enter on private lands without obtaining a search warrant. One example of how this requirement will negatively impact the health and safety of Ohioans is the recent pollution from the train derailment in East Palestine. Responding wildlife officers had to enter multiple properties along the rivers and streams to assess the ecological damage from the accident. It would have been impractical to delay the response to obtain landowner permission or multiple search warrants first. Wild animals cannot determine property lines, and to properly manage and protect these animals, Division employees must be able to cross property boundaries as well – "The ownership of and the title to all wild animals in this state, not legally confined or held by private ownership legally acquired, is in the state, which holds such title in trust for the benefit of all the people."

Wildlife officers follow the United States Constitution and cannot search inside a person's home or business without the owner's consent or a warrant. These changes are unnecessary to protect the public from unreasonable search and seizure. This will only serve poachers and criminals in abusing our wildlife resources. You would be creating a sanctuary for these illegal activities.

Lastly, Wildlife officers enforce bag limits and protection for wildlife species. One example where inspection authority is necessary is enforcing bag limits of yellow perch in both the Lake Erie recreational and commercial fisheries. The resource would be quickly decimated without the ability to check coolers, catches and boats to ensure compliance. There would be no checks and balances

on Ohio's Commercial fishermen, as they would know that wildlife officers would be unable to inspect their daily catch.

Once again, I ask you to reconsider the proposed changes to wildlife officer authority in 1531.13, 1531.131, and 1531.14.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time, and I would be happy to entertain any questions from the committee.