

Representatives

Cindy Abrams
Willis E. Blackshear, Jr.
Juanita O. Brent
Sara P. Carruthers
Rodney Creech
Steve Demetriou
Thomas Hall
Adam C. Miller
Kevin D. Miller
Ismail Mohamed



Chairman

Haraz N. Ghanbari

Vice-Chairman

Phil Plummer

Ranking Member

Cecil Thomas

HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes | October 4, 2023

Chairman Ghanbari called the committee to order at 11:00 a.m.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward HB 230 for sponsor testimony. He introduces Representative Abrams and Representative Swearingen.

Representative Abrams states this bill came from her trip to the border and will address the events she witnessed during this trip. She then shows a video from her trip. She repeats the statistics that were shown in the video. She states that 2 milligrams of fentanyl is a lethal overdose, which by size, is the same as the tip of a pencil. She states that each person that is being trafficked over to the United States is worth twenty-thousand dollars. During the instance shown in the video, there were several people in the back of the truck when it flipped. Additionally, there were several people inside of the car as well. This shows the lack of regard that these traffickers have for human life. She states this bill is not about immigration, it is about the armed criminals smuggling drugs into the country every day. This bill establishes a mandatory term of 5 years if they plead guilty to a fentanyl-related death.

Representative Swearingen states each state needs to be treated as a border state. He states this bill's message is to make sure traffickers know that if they are caught trafficking drugs, they should expect to be arrested and prosecuted.

Ranking Member Thomas states he agrees fentanyl is a problem. However, when there is an increase in penalties, the prison population will increase, and he asks what the growth may look like.

Representative Abrams states she agrees there will be an increase in prison population. However, this is not a problem, this is intentional effort by the cartel and these people should be imprisoned.

Representative Swearingen states these people we would be prosecuting would be the people trafficking the drugs and causing the death of these peoples. He states these people should be in prison for benefiting on addiction and trafficking.

Ranking Member Thomas states he agrees that these people should be imprisoned, and he does understand, however this may cause others to be arrested as well.

Chairman Ghanbari states he believes these people should be growing the prison population instead of the graveyard.

Vice-chair Plummer states it is difficult to prove involuntary manslaughter, however, the mandatory penalty should be increased to 10 years.

Chairman Ghanbari states on death certificates, there is no mandated testing on fentanyl in the deceased body at the time. Therefore, we may be missing cases where there may be probable cause to test for fentanyl.

Representative Abrams states she knows her county is doing the testing.

Chairman Ghanbari states smaller counties may not be doing testing and we should look into this more. He commends Representative Abrams for her trip to the border and he states he has seen the same things that she saw on the Arizona border on the Texas border. He notes that the border patrol is currently not able to enforce the federal restrictions on the border. He urges the federal government to make the same shift and enforce the laws that are already written.

Representative Adam Miller states in Franklin County they recently had a large drug smuggling ring busted and he appreciates the effort being put forward in the bill. He asks, what the bill accomplishes for human trafficking.

Representative Swearingen states the charge of human trafficking builds on the penalties increase with the type of drug that is involved. He notes there is a chart that would help explain all increases.

Ranking Member Thomas asks what state has the strictest drug laws.

Representative Swearingen states he does not know as of now but will research.

Ranking Member Thomas states this would be worth looking into in order to find out what effects these increases will have.

Representative Abrams states this bill is going to address the already found data as to the effectiveness of these policies and address the clear intent that these smugglers have.

Chairman Ghanbari introduces HB 237 for proponent testimony. He introduces Sheriff Lutz.

Sheriff Lutz states that the lack of unity on the law regarding UTV traffic laws is detrimental to enforcement. HB 237 will prevent confusion for citizens and establish clear laws for operating these vehicles when traveling to different counties and townships.

Representative Kevin Miller asks about the safety of use of UTVs on roadways.

Sheriff Lutz states he agrees that UTVs are much safer on the roads as they can have roll bars. Compared to other vehicles such as other 2 or 3 wheeled vehicles, they are safer.

Representative Kevin Miller asks how common UTVs are on the roadways in Appalachia Ohio.

Sheriff Lutz states they are very common, and his county has a lot of farmers that use these vehicles for traveling from farm to farm. As well as many people ride these vehicles on the roads to trails that are in the woods nearby.

Representative Kevin Miller asks what the benefits of the registration and plating of these vehicles is for law enforcement.

Sheriff Lutz states there are two different tags that these vehicles can get. One applies to slower roadways and is only valid for 2 years. This will allow counties to be clear on enforcement and ensure that each citizen will know what abilities they have in each county.

Representative Carruthers asks for clarification on whether slingshots are legal on the roadways.

Sheriff Lutz states they are classified as bikes.

Representative Carruthers asks how they became legal.

Sheriff Lutz states that he is not sure.

Chairman Ghanbari brings forward HB 194 for proponent testimony. He introduces Steve Farrar for proponent testimony.

Steve Farrar states he is the CEO of MyPlates and that he supports HB 194 to authorize the BMV to enter into a contract to offer a competitive bidding process for the creation of these license plates. He clarifies that this bill will not change any of the responsibilities of any department. He states that his company won the contract in Texas and every year their company has created 165 million dollars in new revenue. He states there are concerns for the license plates and the sorts of images or words could be used on the plates. However, these concerns are addressed by moderation and any inappropriate messages are blocked out. The state and BMV will still have oversight as to what plates they will accept in order to make sure that they are easy to read for identification purposes. This program will bring new jobs to the state.

Representative Kevin Miller asks what the amount of revenue will look like when they first start in the state.

Steve Farrar states there will be no change in revenue for the plates that are already on the market. There is no cost to the state and so any new plates that are created through this program will create revenue. In their first year, they created 2 to 3 million of new revenue.

Ranking Member Thomas asks how much a plate would cost for something like a plate for his dog.

Steve Farrar states that in Texas it is within 30-40 dollars. As a program, they would not bring on a design team for a plate unless it has a large marketing process.

Chairman Ghanbari introduces Darren Stout for proponent testimony.

Darren Stout states the main issue that is affecting Ohio's drug task force is funding. Over the past decade, their funding has diminished and there are more agencies that have been created and the low funding already can not keep up with the demand. Due to the task force in Medina, their team has decreased overdose rates by over 40 percent. His task force is 100 percent grant funded. In their region, there is a resurgence of heroine in his county and the drug issue in this state is not going away. Allowing for this program's new revenue to go towards the task force will greatly increase security for every Ohio family.

Chairman Ghanbari introduces Dennis Eng for proponent testimony.

Dennis Eng states runs the task force in Greene County, Ohio. Task forces are the backbone of support for all of the counties law enforcement agencies. The importance of the grants for the task force is they

are necessary for their salaries and staffing. Funding assists with the purchasing of equipment, investigations, gathering evidence, and over time. He states the funding is decreasing; however, all other costs are increasing from everything ranging from drugs to equipment.

Vice-Chair Plummer states the Homeland Security was formed to look at the risks in the state and a large portion is drugs. He asks if they have seen an increase in busts in drug trafficking.

Dennis Eng states there has been a large increase of drugs coming from the Dayton area and his county has become a hub overall for the distribution of drugs to other counties.

Vice-Chair Plummer states that we need to support this bill in order to make sure our task forces have the funding they need in order to be stable every year. The task forces are out last line of protection from the border.

Dennis Eng states the people representing the cartels have recently been released from jail and they will go back to cross the border and be re-introduced to the cartels and fill the positions they previously had before prison.

Ranking Member Thomas asks if there has been discussion for going into Mexico to remove the cartel from their side.

Dennis Eng states there is a group that is working with the Mexican government, however, there is an issue with working with officials in Mexico as many of them are corrupt and cannot be trusted. There is only a finite group in Mexico that you can trust and if the Mexican border control does assist the United States, they often face repercussions.

Chairman Ghanbari asks about a House bill in Congress about a bill that will hamper the task forces.

Dennis Eng states there is, and it is being run by Jim Jordan. The bill will take the amount of money seized from the cartels and it will be given to the treasurer for a general fund, and they will use their discretion for funding. This will decimate any cooperation between state and federal government task forces because there will not be any monetary incentive for investigations. Often, the investigation will fall on the state.

Chairman Ghanbari states our task forces have done a great job of fighting the drug and human trafficking. However, there has to be collaboration with the federal partners, and this is a serious concern for our state and the funds going to the task forces. He states that if that legislation goes through, it will be devastating to the task forces and cripple our communities. He asks if Dennis Eng agrees.

Dennis Eng states he does agree, and we will lose valuable intelligence of who is coming through the border and other vital pieces of information for basic function and would be detrimental.

Chairman Ghanbari states he is grateful for the work task forces do for our communities.

Jason Baumann states he serves Richland County, and he appreciates the financial impact that this bill will have for the task forces, especially his own. Currently, the funding is the most difficult hurdle for the task forces for staying in operation. Now, they have a large role in recovery of the victims of drug trafficking and with this comes a cost. The drug trade is only increasing and the prices for everything is increasing, however, the drug trade is not slowing down and they have a larger demand to meet.

Vice-Chair Plummer asks what the state can do to assist the task forces.

Jason Baumann states the lack of funding has caused the federal funding to assist more, and this also leads to a better connection of intelligence between the agencies.

Vice-Chair Plummer states we have a good amount of funding from the state, and he would like to look into increasing funding.

Chairman Ghanbari states Vice-Chair Plummer will have to come out of retirement to serve the task forces.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward HB 13 for proponent testimony. He points the members to view the testimony on the iPads and carefully review them.

Chairman Ghanbari states we currently do not have a quorum to introduce the amendment for HB 241. He introduces Representative Kevin Miller to explain the amendment.

Representative Kevin Miller states this will allow for the creation of cadet programs.

Chairman Ghanbari asks if the in-house training will be offered by the chief, but it will not replace OPOTA training.

Representative Kevin Miller states it does not.

Chairman Ghanbari adjourns the committee at 12:25 p.m.

Chairman Ghanbari

Ranking Member Thomas