



TESTIMONY OF
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL MIKE DEWINE
S.B. 258, BLUE ALERTS
DECEMBER 14, 2011

Good morning, Chairman Patton, Vice-Chairman LaRose and members of the Senate Highways and Transportation Committee. I am pleased to be here today to offer proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 258, sponsored by Senator Gayle Manning and Chairman Patton.

On Monday, just two days ago, Lorain County Sheriff's Deputy Charles Crausaz was among several deputies responding to a reported shooting and domestic disturbance in LaGrange Township.

After a brief standoff, the gunman began firing at the deputies, wounding Deputy Crausaz. In the commotion, the gunman fled into nearby fields and reportedly attempted to break into a nearby home and barn. After a two-hour manhunt, the gunman was spotted by a police helicopter and ended the incident by taking his own life.

Because we never know when a suspect is going to slip the grasp of law enforcement, this violent and dangerous situation underscores the need to establish a Blue Alert in Ohio to protect law enforcement, nearby residents, and their families.

Senate Bill 258 would establish a statewide Blue Alert. Ohio currently utilizes several alerts that quickly provide information about missing persons through TV and radio broadcasts, highway billboards, and the internet. Many of you are familiar with Amber Alerts, which provide information regarding missing children who are in danger. Communities statewide also utilize Silver Alerts, which help locate senior citizens.

A Blue Alert would utilize a similar communications network to quickly distribute information about an officer who is missing or has been injured or killed and the suspect has fled. It will be a coordinated effort among the Governor's Office; the Department of Public Safety; the Attorney General's Office; local law enforcement agencies; public and commercial television, radio, and cable systems across the state; and others as designated.

Any person brazen enough to kill or harm law enforcement is very likely to be willing to harm civilians. They pose a danger not only to those in uniform, but also to the public at large.

While we hope such a system may never have to be used, a Blue Alert can clearly assist in apprehending dangerous persons sooner.

I want to share with you another example of a situation in which Blue Alert could have been of assistance.

When Senators Manning, Patton, and I announced our support for this legislation, we did so at Cleveland's old Third District Police Headquarters, the "home base" to fallen Cleveland Police

Officer Wayne Leon. Officer Leon's name is one of 737 engraved on the Fallen Officers' Memorial Wall near the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy in London, Ohio.

Officer Leon was shot during a traffic stop on a Sunday morning in June 2000. His murderer was a man wanted on an outstanding arrest warrant. The assailant fled the scene, but was not apprehended until seven hours later in Columbus. Seven hours with a dangerous killer on the loose. Seven hours of a grieving family unsure whether the person who took their husband and father may ever be found.

Senate Bill 258 and Blue Alerts can help address apprehending assailants such as Officer Wayne Leon's murderer much more quickly. It's an example where using TV and radio alerts as well as those electronic signs on interstate highways could clearly have made a difference.

As Ohio's Attorney General, I'm committed to doing everything in my power to enhance the safety of Ohio's law enforcement professionals and bring those who would do them harm to justice. That's why I'm supporting Senate Bill 258 and look forward to working with the other agencies and organizations to make the Blue Alert system effective and successful.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of this bill before your committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.