



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

Ohio House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
HB 341, 132nd General Assembly
Proponent Testimony

Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and Members of the Committee:

I am Paul Pfeifer, Executive Director of the Ohio Judicial Conference, and I am here to provide proponent testimony on behalf of the Conference for House Bill 341.

The Ohio Judicial Conference is made up of all judges in the state of Ohio. Revised Code section 105.91 creating the Conference directs the Conference to encourage uniformity in the application of the law, rules, and practice throughout the state, to promote an exchange of experience and suggestion respecting the operation of the judicial system, and to consider the business and problems pertaining to the administration of justice and to make recommendations for its improvement. HB 341 includes an item on the Conference's Legislative Platform, pertaining to address confidentiality for members of Ohio's judiciary.

The need for this legislation was highlighted this summer when Judge Joseph Bruzzese, a common pleas judge from Jefferson County, was shot and injured by a gunman in a targeted attack. Fortunately, the judge survived the attack, is on the path to recovery, and, I am happy report, recently returned to the bench. Tragic incidents like these cause us to reflect on the effectiveness of the security and safety measures we have in place in our courtrooms and public buildings, and what additional steps can be made to ensure that events like this one do not happen again.

As we are reminded that judges may be targeted and attacked simply for performing their judicial functions, HB 341 closes a gap in state law that could expose judges and their families to harm. Existing public records law exempts from disclosure the personal information of certain public service workers, including prosecuting attorneys, bailiffs, parole officers, correctional employees, and BCII investigators. Judges, however, are not included in this list. Existing law provides no means for judges to shield their home address and other personal and familial information from public disclosure. It makes little sense that judges are not already included in the list of public service workers, like prosecutors and bailiffs, whose personal and residential information is exempt from public disclosure. HB 341 closes this gap by affording judges the same protection given to similar public service workers, and we would urge this Committee to recommend its passage.

We would also like to propose a simple amendment. In consultation with the Ohio Association of Magistrates, we believe it would be appropriate to include magistrates in the bill as well, as they essentially perform the same function as judges, and therefore could be targets of the same threats this bill seeks to prevent.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of HB 341. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

OHIO JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

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