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Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

**Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony – Substitute House Bill 33
Glenn Miller, Henry County Commissioner**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Glenn Miller; I serve as a Henry County Commissioner and as President of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO). Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Indigent defense reimbursement remains a critical priority of the Association and is an investment this body has supported for multiple budget cycles, alongside the DeWine-Husted Administration. The current funding levels within the Substitute House budget bill is estimated by the Office of the Public Defender to fund indigent defense at 78% reimbursement. CCAO is asking this committee for to restore funding to reach full reimbursement. CCAO also supports the \$75 per hour cap on state reimbursement for these services. The \$75 per hour cap is needed to maintain the targeted percentage level of reimbursement, as it will prevent a significant rate increase in one county from consuming an inordinate amount of the appropriation.

Indigent defense is a constitutionally mandated service that counties deliver without much flexibility. Due to the rise in caseloads for traffic violations, misdemeanors, and felonies throughout the state, along with rising public defender cost per case, CCAO is asking for this committee to restore the level of funding in the executive version of the bill, as well as a \$20 million increase each year to ensure full reimbursement over the next biennium.

There are many counties where the average public defender cost per felony case is nearing \$1,000 or more. These counties include Auglaize, Coshocton, Delaware, Geauga, Hancock, and Wood counties. Due to the increase in public defender costs and the rise in caseloads, CCAO believes our indigent funding requests are necessary. Additionally, CCAO seeks language to allow counties to contract with the state for services, as is the case in 10 counties. This ability will decrease the need for counties to increase rates in order to find attorneys to perform the work.

Second, I want to thank this committee and the Ohio House for the proposed \$200 million over the biennium for county jail construction and renovation. As I shared with you before, county jails are facing many challenges, including aging facilities and inmates with complex substance abuse and mental health issues. Thank you for supporting this investment that will greatly improve public safety in Ohio.



CCAO also appreciates the inclusion of language updating the statutory competitive bidding thresholds for counties and other local governments from \$50,000 to \$75,000 in fiscal year 2024 with a three percent increase annually thereafter, and increasing the allowable difference between a public improvement project's estimate cost and the contract price from 10% to 20%. These thresholds have not been increased in over a decade and counties, like the state, are facing record inflation levels. The updated thresholds will result in more efficient government operations.

CCAO would also like to thank the General Assembly for maintaining the \$46 million in dedicated funding to the Next Generation 9-1-1 system. These funds will support county efforts to upgrade and connect to a NG 9-1-1 system. However, the upgrade is only half of the equation; counties will need additional funding to operate the new system. CCAO and other interested parties have agreed on a proposal to seek an increase in the statewide user fee to 64 cents, a decrease from the 70 cents we initially sought. Revenue from the user fee goes towards funding 9-1-1 operations in the state. We have also agreed on a new definition to determine what devices are included within the user fee.

Finally, CCAO respectfully requests an increase in the Local Government Fund (LGF). The substitute bill maintains the slight increase to 1.70% of state GRF tax revenue from the current 1.66%. With other state tax cuts included in the bill, counties and other local governments may see a decrease in this revenue sharing from the state. After several months of discussion, CCAO and the Ohio Township Association jointly support an increase to 2.50% of state GRF tax revenue. This proposal is a modest increase that provides flexible funding to allow counties to meet various needs across the state in providing services and programs to Ohioans.

Additionally, we would like to thank the General Assembly for the inclusion of language that would raise the lowest amount a county undivided local government fund can receive from \$750,000 to \$850,000. However, we believe an LSC drafting error was made. The current language would decrease LGF distributions to 19 counties. These include the majority of the least populated counties, ranging from Vinton County and to Holmes County. Out of the 19 counties, Jackson County would see the biggest decrease with an estimated \$59,000. We would ask the committee to remove "smaller" and replace the language with "greater" within Sec. 5747.501.

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the committee, thank you for the investments in these critical services that you have proposed. We look forward to working with you to continue to strengthen the state-county partnership.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.