



**Representative Gerald L. Stebelton**  
**77<sup>th</sup> District**

Sponsor Testimony  
House Bill 661  
House Finance Committee  
Tuesday, November 18, 2014

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Good afternoon Chairman Amstutz, Vice Chairman Boose, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 661, which seeks to increase the salaries of Ohio's elected officials.

The need for this legislation comes from the fact that Ohio is falling further and further behind its counterparts on paying its elected officials who create and implement policies for the 7<sup>th</sup> largest state in our Nation. In order to attract and retain the best and brightest professionals to the most important positions in state government we must ensure that they are being compensated at appropriate levels.

House bill 661 encompasses the following elected officials; Judges, County elected officials, County Boards of Elections, Township Trustees, the General Assembly and Statewide officeholders. The last time a pay raise bill was considered was in the 123<sup>rd</sup> (1999-2000) General Assembly under Substitute House Bill 712. The intent of that legislation is mirrored in the current version of House Bill 661.

Ohio's judges have been without compensation adjustments for six years and their salaries are undervalued by comparison to similar states. For example, the salary for a Common Pleas Court judge is \$121,000. This amount ranks Ohio **43<sup>rd</sup> out of 50** states, falling behind all of our neighboring states including *Pennsylvania (7), Michigan (26), Indiana (33), West Virginia (39), and Kentucky (41)*. Not to mention, we are also lagging behind smaller states such as *Wyoming (16) and North Dakota (35)*. This legislation proposes that Judges receive a five percent increase in 2015-2018 plus the lesser of three percent or the previous year CPI. Beginning in 2019 and annually thereafter, the lesser of three percent or the previous CPI will be used for a COLA increase. It is imperative that we offer our judges a compensation that although not the same, will be competitive with the private sector, so that we can attract the brightest attorneys who possess significant court room experience. Even with the proposed increases, Ohio trial judges will rank 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation unless other states also increase judicial compensation.

County elected officials, along with other elected officials, last received a cost of living adjustment in 2008. If legislation is not enacted and effective before January 1, 2015, county auditors and the county commissioners, State Senators, and state wide officials who were elected in November 2014 will go 10 years with no change in base compensation. Members of the House of Representatives will also be denied an increase until their next term begins in 2017. This legislation seeks to change the pay scale of County elected officials other than judges and make a reduction in the number of population pay classes of counties from eight to six. This would modernize the pay structure and provide a modest pay raise for county officials, most of whom would not otherwise realize any increase until 2017. Finding people to run for county level offices is getting increasingly difficult, especially in the smaller counties, because of the salary levels being so low.

County Boards of Elections would receive a salary increase of five percent in 2015 and 2016. Beginning in 2017 and annually thereafter, the lesser of three percent or the previous years CPI will be used for a COLA increase. Township trustees would receive a nominal one percent increase in 2015 along with the implementation of a COLA. Beginning in 2016, the lesser of three percent or the previous years CPI will be applied.

The Statewide officeholders and General Assembly will not receive any sort of retroactive raise or a catch up from 2008. Rather, starting in 2015 and annually thereafter they will receive an increase equal to the lesser of three percent or the previous years CPI. Under the leadership of the last two General Assembly's (129<sup>th</sup> & 130<sup>th</sup>) we have been able to get Ohio back on its feet. After filling an \$8 billion budget shortfall without raising taxes and taking the rainy day fund from \$.89 to over \$1 billion we have succeeded in working in a bipartisan fashion to help put Ohio back on track. In order to maintain this momentum we must make sure that we are attracting the top talent in this state.

This legislation is supported by the Ohio Council of County Officials(OCCO) which includes; County Auditors, Clerks of Court, Commissioners, Coroners, Engineers, Judicial Conference, Prosecuting Attorneys, Recorders, Sherriff's, and Treasurers. They have been working together for nearly a year to reach an agreement within their offices and have all agreed this proposal fits within their groups needs.

Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that we can all work together to create an Ohio that will attract the talented and charismatic individuals it takes to keep this great state moving forward. I wholeheartedly think that this legislation is a step in that direction.

Thank you, Chairman Amstutz and members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.