Dear Representative/Senator Last Name,

As the Fire Service Position Title in XXX County I am writing to urge you to support the removal of language within the Transportation Budget, HB 62, that would allow Butler County and Stark County to realign their county Emergency Management Program under a county sheriff or county fire chief. Currently there are no county fire chiefs within our state, meaning this language would only apply to the sheriffs.

Even if the language is currently limited to Stark and Butler counties, it will still impact all counties across the state as our response to large emergency events is never limited to one county, and oftentimes results in the pooling of resources from all 88 counties. This pilot program also set a dangerous precedent for the future of emergency response in our own county.

There are countless reasons for why this policy would inflict a hardship on the emergency response within a county, however two of the biggest reasons that I want to highlight for you are the funding of the EMA program and the effectiveness of the emergency response effort coordinated through their office.

Much of the funding for a county EMA program is received through federal grants which stipulate that the organization must be a neutral entity, meaning not be affiliated with an elected official. By having the EMA report to the county Sheriff, that EMA program would likely lose a majority of its funding, for which the county commissioners will have to compensate from their own budget. As we all know, local government funding has been greatly reduced in recent years and this would only increase this fiscal strain.

Additionally, an EMA program helps coordinate the resources needed before, during and after a large-scale emergency response. In the fire service, we work closely with these EMA Directors and rely heavily on their resources in order to do our jobs effectively. As an employee of a county sheriff, the EMA Director will no longer be a neutral entity when it comes to allocating those resources and will have to prioritize the needs of their department over those of countless other community partners in need.

Ultimately, I am asking that an amendment with such serious implications to public safety be considered as a stand-alone bill to be discussed with all interested parties around the table. For the betterment of emergency response and the protection of the residents within our communities, please help us to remove this language from HB 62.

Sincerely,

Name

Position