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House Corrections and Juvenile Justice
HB2177 Increasing the criminal penalties for
certain violations of fleeing or attempting to elude
a police officer when the person has prior
convictions of the offense

Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Resman, Ranking Schlingensiepen, Committee:

I come to you as a policy advocate, not representing my employer, but as a subject matter expert with experience, knowledge, and motivation to see this policy adopted. HB2177 is intended to address a problem that has become a life-threatening epidemic. While police vehicle pursuits are not a new concept, the increased numbers of pursuits has certainly caught the attention of the media and the public. No one can deny the danger of pursuits. Yet, what we can't seem to agree on is the means that we might employ to end them.

However, this policy is meant to address a certain population with a particular disregard for life and safety of our families relative to this crime. As an example, my county sheriff's agency assisted in a pursuit, recently, in which the perpetrator traveled through several counties before being apprehended in ours. In each of those counties, this individual exceeded 140 mph, passed on hills, failed to yield to vehicles, and somehow managed to avoid multiple near misses at a high rate of speed. Upon identifying him and seeing his criminal record, it was discovered that this individual had multiple instances of this very same behavior. In his opinion, it would appear that he believes endangering innocent lives and property is his right. What was his crime? Drug possession. He has committed this crime so often that he knows better than most it won't add much to the sentence he will serve, if he gets caught. He knows because it is what he does and, to him, it's worth the chance.

His attitude is shared by many like him. In my county of a little over 8,000, we have I-35 and US 75 that cross through our borders. I estimate we can expect to engage in pursuit an average of 3 times a week. We have had fatalities, major injury, etc. because some just don't see the crime as a big deal, and they begin to believe they are good at it.

Graduating the severity of the penalty will send a message to them that every time they do this, it will matter more.

Thank you,
Eric L. Smith

