

ers by not renegotiating terms. This is particularly damaging to homeowners, because an in-

the loan number and payment coupon.

Helping the mentally ill

Ohio lawmakers should move quickly on proposed legislation that aims to prevent tragedies like the May 25 slaying of Cleveland Heights Police Officer Jason West.

State Rep. Tom Patton of Strongsville has introduced a thoughtful bill, dubbed "Jason's Law," that would require treatment for mentally ill people deemed to pose a danger to themselves or others. Although concerns about individual rights must be considered during deliberations on this measure, they cannot be allowed to outweigh the imperative of protecting the public. West's death at the hands of a mentally ill person has made painfully clear the consequences of inaction.

Timothy Halton Jr., a man with a long history of psychiatric problems and violent outbursts, shot and killed the 31-year-old West as the officer responded to a disturbance on Altamont Avenue. In the days after the killing, Halton's mother told of her frustrations in trying to get treatment for her son, amid the abundant evidence of his need. Halton, for example, took prescribed drugs while in court-ordered treatment after an assault on a South Euclid

police officer, but faced no such mandates once released from probation.

A handful of states have laws that make it easier to force mentally ill people to receive treatment to keep them from harming themselves or others. And most of those laws were made after killings by people in the throes of delusions or disorientation. Concerns about civil liberties typically prevent bold action until deaths like West's painfully clarify the issue.

Concern for individual rights is certainly valid; no one favors a society where one person can easily compel another to submit to treatment — the potential for abuse is simply too high. But Patton's measure specifically articulates the conditions required for such commitments and demands that expert evaluations be a part of the process.

That said, this proposal will place yet more demands on an already overburdened system; lawmakers should examine ways to ensure additional resources to meet them.

For the moment, though, Patton's proposal could provide help to those in need — and spare others senseless loss.