



RE: HOUSE BILL 263

DATE: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2017

ORGANIZATION: WAGTOWN, INC.

SPEAKER: BETH A. MILLER

Good afternoon. My name is Beth Miller and I am President and CEO of Wagtown, an Ohio-born national nonprofit which advocates for responsible and authentic dog-friendliness in America. Our research to date spans **347** site visits and interviews in **12** states. We have talked at length with leaders in regional vibrancy, innovation, health & human services, animal control, economic development, travel & tourism, animal rescue, public art, food service, waste management, infrastructure and land use planning, and more. Following all of this primary and secondary research, I offer the following testimony.

This bill is about **giving business owners the choice**, not forcing them to be dog-friendly. For some restaurant owners, it may be a personally-motivated choice, for others it will most certainly be a **business sustainability decision**.

I agree that dogs at a restaurant changes the "brand experience" of that establishment. The restaurant owner determines what that experience includes, within the confines of the law. In some cases, dog-friendliness may genuinely reflect their statement of who they are as a dining or socializing experience. In other cases, it may not. This action simply gives the restaurant or bar owner the **freedom and discretion** to make that call and to do so **within the boundaries of the law**.

At a recent legislative meeting attended by the Ohio Department of Health, Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, interested members of the public, Cleveland Animal Protective League, Wagtown, Director of Public Health Policy for the City of Columbus, ASPCA, a registered sanitarian expert with the state of Ohio, Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Director of The Humane Society of the United States, Ohio 4 Pups On Patios, and Department of Agriculture, State Representative Laura Lanese directly asked both the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture if they had **ANY** evidence to suggest that dogs on patios should not move forward. Both responded, "**We do not.**" She also cited a research project from the California Institute of Public and Environmental Health concluded that "**there is no evidence out there to show that dogs on patios increases any health concerns.**"

That being said, this is "new territory" for some in Ohio. Representative Lanese acknowledged that while there may be more to learn, there is **no evidence to support blocking restauranteurs** (or future entrepreneurial ventures) from making the dog-friendly choice **should it suit their brand and clientele**.

One thing is certain: the pet industry is predicted to continue its uninterrupted climb to **\$74 billion** this year. Whether your reaction to doggies in day care and poodles in skirts causes heart swell or heartburn, that multibillion-dollar industry forecast is the evolving reality of the dogs and their relationship to humans in America. There is **no question that dollars follow dogs** and consumers are making buying and brand loyalty decisions **based on dog accommodation**. House Bill 263 **allows business owners to have the choice** on how to, or if to, hitch their wagon to that economic flow. **The question at hand is, "Does Ohio want to provide the opportunity for businesses to make the most of the economic impact of dog-friendly communities?"**

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