



OHIO HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION
692 N. HIGH ST. SUITE 212
COLUMBUS OH 43215-1564
P: (614) 461-6462

Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee - March 20, 2018
Testimony on Substitute House Bill 439
Joe Savarise, Executive Director, Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to add perspectives from Ohio's professional hotel and lodging industry in opposition to Substitute House Bill 439.

I'm Joe Savarise, Executive Director for the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association (OHLA). Ohio is home to nearly 1,500 licensed and active hotel properties providing more than 131,000 rooms to guests across the state. We employ more than 35,000 people directly and support 93,000 hotel-related jobs, produce nearly \$800 million in employee wages and are an integral part of Ohio's vital travel economy. With more than 26 million room nights sold in Ohio annually, hotels have a \$25.5 billion total economic impact in our state, and support \$3.4 billion in taxes.

Our interest in this legislation is a result of one of our association's core pillars, "Championing Safety and Security." One of the problems in this area that we emphasize – because our businesses can have a direct impact on addressing it – is the real and tragic problem of human trafficking. Our industry has made a commitment and is taking an active role in the fight against human trafficking, along with partners at the federal, state and local level.

While trafficking isn't limited to only our businesses, hotel and lodging employees are on the front line of this problem. They are often in the best position to see potential signs of human trafficking. For this reason, we have made it part of our ongoing work as an association to equip our members with the tools they need to effectively address suspected trafficking activities.

Additionally, we have been working closely with the impactful initiatives put forth by Governor Kasich and Attorney General DeWine to engage in efforts to help victims, many of whom are children, and end this criminal activity.

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Our anti-trafficking efforts rely heavily on making lasting and meaningful connections within the law enforcement community. Through our work with these local agencies, anti-trafficking experts who work in the field every day have shared real-world experiences about the difficulties in making sure that perpetrators of this crime are tracked and held accountable. The use of false identities, failure to appear in court, and other challenges are concerning to us as we attempt to stem this problem.

We are concerned that this bill will make it easier for accused criminals to avoid facing their day in court and ultimately, being brought to justice. By asking these individuals to simply promise to appear, without any real incentive to do so, we could make the jobs of those who work to bring offenders to justice that much harder – and move our efforts backward, rather than forward.

Our law enforcement partners have shared how under the current system, it is already difficult to keep tabs on trafficking offenders. These men and women are already working hard every day to investigate and arrest perpetrators of this crime. Traffickers are motivated by powerful financial rewards to engage in this heinous activity. By removing their incentive to appear in court, we are allowing these perpetrators to simply walk away and continue their illegal activities. Doing so undermines the hard work of law enforcement and puts victims of crime – including victims of human trafficking – at unnecessary additional risk.

We ask that members of the committee consider the dedicated hard work being demonstrated by collaboratives throughout the state to address human trafficking when reviewing Substitute House Bill 439. The Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association opposes the bill as it currently reads.

Thank you.