

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

My name is Dave Wilson and I am the President of the Guernsey County Board of Commissioners.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of House Bill 530.

I am in the fourth year of my first term as a Guernsey County Commissioner. Shortly after taking office, we collectively determined which of three of us would serve on the various boards and committees within our county and region.

I gladly accepted the designation as our Board's representative to the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors and Convention Bureau.

Before running for office, I was part of the management and ownership of the radio station group serving Guernsey and surrounding counties for nearly 32-years. During that time, I was acutely aware of the significance of the tourism industry to our county and region. I had the opportunity to work closely with the local VCB director, Debbie Robinson, on a number of occasions.

You see, Guernsey County is home to a host of established and unique tourist attractions including: Salt Fork – Ohio's largest state park and lodge; The Living Word Outdoor Drama – Ohio's only passion play with a breath-taking, authentic set spanning some 400-feet; The Dicken's Victorian Village where, during November and December, vignettes of the Dicken's era span five-blocks of Cambridge's main thoroughfare; The Guernsey County Courthouse Music and Light Show – a spectacular computerized display of synchronized music and lights during the holiday season; The Wilds – an amazing 10,000-acre animal conservation area affiliated with the Columbus Zoo, of which Guernsey County is a primary gateway; and the expansive Seneca Lake Park, encompassing Ohio's third largest inland waterway.

That was not intended to be a commercial for Guernsey County tourism but rather to underscore the importance of the tourism industry to our local economy. And what is important to the local economy is of prime importance to our Board of Commissioners.

For that reason alone, it is incumbent upon our Board to be aware of the health of this important industry. Being at the intersection of Interstates 70 and 77, we have a host of restaurants, hotels, motels, B&Bs, cabins and campgrounds. The importance of the health of these entities to the health of our local economy is reflected in numbers supplied by Tourism Ohio.

According to the latest report available to me, tourism in Guernsey County generated \$162-million in sales during 2015, generating \$46.6-million in wages and \$21.2-million in federal, state and local tax revenue. In addition, 1763 people are employed in

Guernsey County in tourism-related jobs. In 2015, that accounted for 9.2% of our county's sustained salaried employment.

As a Commissioner, I have an interest in knowing the health of our hospitality industry and its carryover effect on our retail base, especially since the loss of Local Government Funds has raised the importance of sales tax revenue, which now accounts for more than 44% of our General Fund.

In conclusion, I'm asking you to allow me – and elected officials like me – to resume our positions on our local VCB boards and keep our collective fingers of the pulse of tourism in our counties.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address your committee!