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April 10th, 2018

The Honorable Marlene Anielski, Chair
State and Local Government Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 12th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairwoman Anielski and members of the House State and Local Government Committee—

On behalf of the members of the Ohio Aviation Association (OAA), I am writing to express support for House Bill 543, which would allow port authorities, airport authorities, and regional planning commissions the ability to obtain legal assistance from a county prosecutor.

This issue was brought to my attention by several of OAA's smaller, rural airport members. Historically, county prosecutors provided assistance to airport authority and port authority boards within their jurisdiction under a contract and fee schedule negotiated between the board and prosecutor. This provided the airport or port authority board with a cost effective resource for routine legal issues similar to support provided to county- and municipally-owned airports.

In 2015, Attorney General Mike DeWine issued an opinion at the request of the Wayne County Prosecutor that argue airport authority boards could not obtain legal assistance from a county prosecutor as they are not a county entity. In order for county prosecutors to continue to provide these services, a statutory change is required. House Bill 543 provides that remedy.

The bill is completely permissive; a county prosecutor would decide whether or not to provide legal representation and would be able to negotiate fees. HB 543 provides airport authority, port authority, and regional planning commission boards with an alternative solution to their legal needs. For Ohio airports, especially smaller, rural airports, this is an important bill that restores legal assistance that was in place until 2015.

In closing, I would like to commend Representatives Perales and Hambley for sponsoring this important legislation and encourage the members of this committee to support the measure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Stacey Heaton
Executive Director
Ohio Aviation Association