Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 42, adding a small depiction of the Wright Brothers’ first piloted airplane to the Great Seal of the State of Ohio.

My name is Timothy R. Gaffney. I’m communications director for the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, a not-for-profit corporation authorized by Congress as the management entity for the National Aviation Heritage Area. The Heritage Area is a region of eight counties in southwestern Ohio designated as a U. S. National Heritage Area under a program administered by the National Park Service. Our mission is to preserve and promote the nationally important aviation heritage assets within the Heritage Area.

Fifty years ago this year, an Ohioan named Neil Armstrong made the first human footprints on the moon. He carried with him two objects that were also from Ohio: A small swatch of fabric and a piece of wood from the Wright brothers’ 1903 Wright Flyer. He was paying homage to two other Ohioans who went before him, Wilbur and Orville Wright. Had they not invented the airplane and gone on to create America’s aviation industry, Neil Armstrong would not have walked on the moon.

The Wright brothers changed history, and the Wright Flyer is recognized worldwide as a symbol of their achievement. We see this in our Heritage Area as visitors come from around the world to learn more about the Wright brothers and the many other aviation and space achievements by people from Ohio.

One of our biggest challenges is educating people outside of Ohio—and even people within the state—about the central role Ohio has played, and continues to play, in the invention of the airplane and the development of the aerospace industry. Adding a Wright Flyer to the State Seal would brand Ohio as the true Birthplace of Aviation.
Several attempts have been made over the years to add the Wright Flyer to the State Seal. Perhaps it was meant to be that we would have the opportunity to do it this year, as one small step in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong’s giant leap for mankind.

Very respectfully,

Timothy R. Gaffney
Director of Communications