

**Small Nation Testimony in Support
of HB 669 & 674**

The logo for Small Nation, featuring the words "SMALL" and "NATION" stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a solid red rectangular background.

August 30, 2020

Chair Hoagland, Vice-Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

Small Nation has been intimately involved in the revitalization of downtown Bellefontaine, a town of roughly 13,000 people in Logan County. Ten years ago, our downtown was not a place you would bring your family or consider spending your money in – mostly because there were no businesses to spend money in. Our vacancy rate was high, and our city's confidence was shaken. Over the last seven years, my team and I have rehabbed thirty historic buildings, helped over twenty new small businesses get on their feet, and created over twenty-four new upper-floor loft apartments, all culminating in nearly \$17 million in new private investment and over one hundred and twenty jobs. We are proud of our town.

The key factor to our downtown's resurgence has been our restaurants. Our restaurants drive the foot traffic necessary to help our retailers make money and imbues an energy in the downtown that makes people want to live there. Our downtown is a living, breathing ecosystem that relies on every cog turning. Keeping local, independent restaurants strong is a critical part of preserving the progress we have made in our downtown, as well as a necessity for dozens of other downtowns across our state. House Bills 669 and 674 are critically important to the recovery efforts of our industry in the months ahead.

We operate three restaurants in our community, and carryout and delivery services have been critical to their survival, particularly of alcoholic beverages. We appreciate the General Assembly's understanding that these profitable offerings are necessary to help small businesses like ours survive, and we support making these options permanent. We also support

expanding restaurant footprints to allow owners to utilize their full property boundaries in the operation of their business.

Additionally, outdoor dining not only expands the ability of restaurants to add capacity to their operations in a safe and responsible way, it also provides another avenue for small business to drive revenue during this trying time. Empowering local policymakers with the ability to make the best decisions for their local communities and supporting the small businesses in their towns and cities with greater flexibility and permanency to allow outdoor dining will be critical in the late summer and early fall dining season. It also reinjects energy into a downtown district while safely allowing patrons to enjoy their favorite meal or drink.

We also support the elimination of statutory limitations on Sunday sales of alcohol. As it sits currently, some of our restaurants are unable to sell alcohol on Sundays but can sell Monday through Saturday. While we could engage in a potentially costly option election, we feel that effort and capital would be better spent supporting the operations of our businesses and hiring new employees, particularly in light of the challenging economic times brought on by the pandemic. Business owners should be given every opportunity to drive revenue for their business and support their employees every day of the week. This provision would do exactly that.

We thank this committee and the General Assembly for supporting this vital industry in our state, as well as small and large communities across Ohio.

Jason Duff
Founder & CEO
Small Nation