

SB 182 Proponent Testimony – December 5, 2017
Ohio Pups 4 Patios – A grassroots group
Co-Founder Laurie Arsenault

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee. Good afternoon. My name is Laurie Arsenault. I am one of the co-founders of the grassroots group Ohio 4 Pups On Patios. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak as a proponent of Senate Bill 182.

Prior to April 2017, it was common to see dogs on outdoor bar and restaurant patios in Columbus and other cities all across Ohio. Many businesses welcomed dogs on their patios because it brought in additional business and for many it was part of their business model. Several businesses partnered with rescue organizations, such as RescuedOhio, and shelters across the state to host "Pups on the Patio" events as a means to raise money and give people a chance to meet adoptable dogs. This process helped save the lives of countless animals while significantly increasing profits for the hosting establishments.

In April, the many local businesses in Columbus that were allowing dogs on their patios received a letter reminding them that it was not permitted in the state of Ohio, forcing them to turn away customers with dogs and cancel rescue fundraisers and adoption events. This sudden selective enforcement of an outdated law left the Ohio dog community devastated.

But what happened next was unexpected and truly extraordinary. After several dog friendly events were canceled, dog owners and business owners from all across the state of Ohio immediately took to social media to express their frustration and desire to see a change in the law. The response was overwhelming. Not only do dogs impact our economy and provide us with health benefits, they also have the ability to bring people together to fight to change a law they strongly believe is interfering with how small business owners run their businesses.

As a result of this strong outcry, in May, I formed Ohio 4 Pups On Patios with a volunteer from RescuedOhio. We started a petition advocating that business owners in Ohio be given the choice to allow dogs on patios, as many other states have done in recent years. The petition gained fast support from Ohio residents and business owners. To date, the petition has over 10,000 signatures from across the state. We have stayed in constant communication with those supporters informing them on how

they can support this bill and educating them about responsible dog ownership as it relates to dog-friendly patio dining in optimistic preparation for the passage of this bill.

Bar and restaurant owners from several other cities including Dayton, Cleveland, Canton and Cincinnati have contacted us to express support for this legislation. Cincinnati is home of The Oakley Pup Crawl. The Pup Crawl is a family friendly event held on a Sunday afternoon. It gives families the opportunity to spend a day with their dogs and visit over a dozen participating local bars and restaurants. There are activities for children and over 40 small business vendors set up shop along the way. In six short hours, this year's event raised over **\$52,000** that was given to The Ohio State University for canine cancer research. This is just one example that shows the positive impact that Senate Bill 182 would have for small businesses and how events such as this could attract dog-friendly tourists from all over the country.

Thanks to social media, Facebook and Instagram have united dog owners from around the world. We communicate daily with each other and trade recommendations on dog food, health, and most importantly to us here in this room, travel. We choose vacation destinations and places to meet based on how dog-friendly the destination is. Melissa Haliburton, the President and Founder of Bring Fido.com told us that "every week, thousands of dog owners search BringFido.com for information on pet friendly hotels, restaurants, activities and other resources in the state of Ohio. A large portion of those visitors are tourists looking for places to bring their pets on vacation." She was shocked to hear that Ohio does not allow outdoor pet-friendly dining and stressed that Ohio is alienating a large community of travelers.

Research and common sense do not support the existence of this ban.

- People cook and eat food around dogs every single day in their own homes and their own backyards and there is no sickness. There is no research to support the notion that dogs pose a health or sanitation risk that when certain safeguards are put in place.
- The number of businesses that would even be affected by this bill is very slim - it's mainly breweries, wineries, casual restaurants and tap rooms with food trucks that have business models compatible with dog friendly dining.
- And of those establishments, only those with outdoor patios that have a separate access would be eligible. An even smaller number.
- And since we live in Ohio, patio season is – at best - 7 months of the year
- I would venture to say that the businesses that were allowing dogs before would continue to do so without violation and businesses that didn't allow it, probably still wouldn't. Practically speaking not much would change.

We would highly encourage Ohio to follow the lead of other states, like New York, which overwhelmingly passed common-sense legislation in 2015 to update their health laws to permit pet-friendly outdoor dining with minimal regulatory burden. Giving business owners the option of allowing dogs on patios promotes the economy, unites communities, increases tourism, and helps Ohio stay current and progressive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.