**HB 263 Proponent Testimony – May 22, 2018**

**Ohio Pups 4 Patios – A grassroots group**

**Co-Founder Laurie Arsenault**

Good afternoon. My name is Laurie Arsenault. I am one of the co-founders of the group Ohio 4 Pups On Patios. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak as a proponent of House Bill 263.

Prior to April 2017, it was common to see dogs on outdoor patios in Columbus and other cities all across Ohio. Many businesses welcomed dogs on their patios because they were dog lovers, because it brought in additional business, or because it's what their customers wanted. Many rescue organizations, such as RescuedOhio, and shelters across the state utilized "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.

In April, the many local businesses in Columbus who were allowing dogs on their patios received a letter reminding them that this is 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 This sudden selective enforcement of an outdated law left the Ohio dog community devastated.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 the cancelation of dog friendly events, 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. There can be no mistake. Dogs bring people together.

As a result of this strong outcry, in May, I formed Ohio 4 Pups On Patios with Christie Ross, a volunteer for RescuedOhio. We started a petition asking 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 gained over 10,000 signatures from across the state.

We have been contacted by bar and restaurant owners from several other cities including Dayton, Cleveland, Canton and Cincinnati. They are supportive of the Bill but many can’t even imagine what a patio ban would look like since their health departments are not, and do not, intend on enforcing the current outdated law. Cincinnati is home to one of the biggest fundraisers – The Oakley Pup Crawl. In 5 years, the Oakley Pup Crawl has grown from 220 crawlers to over 1500. 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 vendors to 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. Raising that much money and generating that much business in a single afternoon would not be possible if dogs were not allowed on patios. You see, dogs bring people together.

Events were held all through the summer in order to promote awareness of this bill. Each event had an incredible turnout. Dogs that attended were **healthy**, **well-behaved**, **leashed** and under the control of an adult. The only animal waste we have ever seen on a patio during one of these events was from a bird which is a far greater health and sanitation issue as it landed directly on the table. There have been **no dog** **fights**, **no dog bites**, **no barking**, and **no dog or person has ever become ill**. We have never even heard a single complaint. Business owners continue to invite us back, and tell us that not only do they enjoy the events, they see "substantial" increases in sales during those events. Patrons constantly ask us when the next event will be and regularly follow us on social media to receive notifications of upcoming events. Again you can see that dogs bring people together.

Please allow me to put your mind at ease.

* No dog owner would even think of bringing their dog out to a patio if their dog was sick. Instead they stay home and post photos on social media snuggling up to their dog.
* No dog owner who has a dog that can’t handle the stress of the patio would ever put their dog in that situation. We hear it ALL of the time. We are constantly approached by people who have left their dogs at home. They come over to pat our dogs because they miss theirs.
* As far as allergies are concerned, there are other options for those patrons although no business owner we have ever spoken with has said it’s ever been an issue. At the end of the day, it’s the business owner who is losing a customer. It seems as though they should be able to assume that risk without the government interfering.
* ANS you might even be surprised to know ….that many of the dog owners you see on the patio ….are actually allergic to dogs as well.
* At some point it comes down to common sense.
  + People cook and eat food around dogs every single day in their own homes and their own backyards and there is no sickness. The number of businesses that would even be effected by this bill is very slim.
  + We’re talking about breweries, wineries, casual restaurants and tap rooms with food trucks.
  + Of those places, only those with outdoor patios that have a separate access would be eligible
  + 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. Not much would change.

Research has shown that dogs pose no threat to health or sanitation. Giving business owners the option of allowing dogs on patios promotes the economy, unites communities, increases tourism, and helps Ohio stay current and progressive. Giving business owners the ability to allow dogs on patios is truly important to Ohioans. You can see the support in this room – it’s delightfully filled with paw print stickers. Dogs bring out the good in people. Their benevolence helps us connect with our own. And because they have NO VOICE and NO VOTE we stand together for dogs today and always because dogs truly bring people together. It’s the least we can do.

We sincerely hope you will pass this legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration.