



June 4, 2018

Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on House Bill 263, legislation to authorize a food service operation or retail food establishment to allow a person to bring a dog in an outdoor dining area of the establishment or operation under specified conditions.

Founded in 1884, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice of business within the 11-county Columbus Region, representing over 1,600 members employing over 500,000 workers. Our goals related to H.B. 263 are to ensure businesses can operate efficiently in a competitive business environment that allows them to grow and thrive, and to grow the region's economy.

Approximately 37% of pet owners take their animals on the road, up 19% from 10 years ago. Not only is the Columbus region home to numerous events that are geared towards pets, but Experience Columbus has also launched a new dog-friendly travel program that helps residents and visitors identify dog-friendly lodging, shopping, and attractions throughout the city. Many establishments, including those within the growing microbrewery industry, have expressed the desire to welcome dogs on their patios and promote access through the Experience Columbus program. However, current law under Ohio Administrative Code Section 3717-1-06.4 prohibits them from doing so.

Many states and municipalities across the country have already enacted or are working towards changing their health code to allow restaurants this option, including California, Denver, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Tennessee, and Washington, DC. The Columbus Chamber opposes varied, local, piecemeal ordinances that create a patchwork of regulations that are complicated and difficult for businesses operating in multiple jurisdictions to comply with. Therefore, we would oppose efforts granting authority to municipalities to create their own regulations and variances relating to dogs on patios, as well as the creation of a permitting process that would add an additional layer of costs and bureaucracy on businesses. We support one uniform statewide statute that will provide clarity and consistency. We request a robust general law that leaves the least amount of discretion to the agencies to interpret through the rulemaking process, without burdening restaurant owners with overregulation that fails to recognize their desire and ability to ensure the utmost health and safety for their guests.

A myriad of differences exist between the House and Senate proposals on this topic, both of which are pending before this committee. Of primary importance to the Chamber and our members are the following:

Broad business owner discretion that allows businesses to:

1. Decide *if* they will allow dogs on their premises
2. Impose limits on the size and breed of dog permitted on their premises
3. Deny entry to the premises to any patron accompanied by a dog
4. Refuse to serve the owner of a pet dog if the owner fails to exercise reasonable control over the pet dog or the pet dog otherwise is behaving in a manner that compromises or threatens to compromise the health or safety of any person present in the restaurant
5. Implement any other limitations or restrictions relating to dogs that may accompany a patron onto the premises

Protection from liability:

1. The dog owner is liable for any damage or injury caused by dog to the premises, fixtures and furniture, employees and patrons
2. The dog owner must be a responsible adult in control of the dog

With summer rapidly approaching and patio season already in full swing, the Chamber encourages swift action on legislation to support the small business constituencies that H.B. 263 and S.B. 182 (Coley) aim to assist.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions or require additional information.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Holly Gross
Vice President, Government Relations