

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chairman Kunze, Ranking Minority Member Schiavoni, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee my name is Donna Grube I am the Executive Director of the Auglaize & Mercer Counties Convention and Visitors Bureau, Immediate Past President of the Ohio Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus and I currently serve as President of Ohio Byway Links, a non-profit organization that supports and promotes Ohio's Byways. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony supporting SB 117.

The Ohio Department of Transportation established the State Scenic Byway Program per Ohio Revised Code 5516.05 in 1998 in response to changes in federal law. The program replaced the Scenic Highways Program established by ODOT in 1962. Any scenic highway had to reapply to participate in the new State Scenic Byway Program.

The Scenic Byway Program is a grassroots effort designed to increase the focus on Ohio's history and intrinsic resources. The intent of this program is to preserve, enhance and protect the states intrinsic resources for visitors and residents of the state by designation of highway, roads and streets as scenic byway corridors.

Presently there are 27 byways in Ohio. They cover nearly 2,400 miles and traverse through 50 counties showcasing Ohio's culture, history, nature, recreation and scenic beauty. The Ohio Byway experience highlights Ohio River and Lake Erie vistas, the history of the canals, the National Road and Lincoln Highway. It delights travelers with scenic views ranging from the Hocking Hills to the Big Darby Plains to the Old Mill Stream and it gives travelers a glimpse into some of the early groups who settled this state along the Welsh, Amish Country and Land of the Cross Tipped Churches byways. Travelers today are looking for authentic experiences and that is what they find along Ohio's byways.

The Ohio Byway Program encourages drivers to take the road less traveled and enjoy the journey through the many small towns and communities in our state. With May being the start of tourism season in Ohio, it would be fitting for travelers to consider adding a drive along an Ohio byway, stopping to explore and enjoy these areas of the state, to their travel plans this month.

While the byways are an Ohio Department of Transportation designation, each individual byway is guided by a local, non-profit committee that works to enhance the experience for visitors and local citizens alike. An official designation from the legislature would enhance promotion efforts and encourage travelers to seek out these special routes. The designation may also lead to a greater sense of pride and community that develops as local residents become more aware of the byways' intrinsic values. Driving creates new dollars spent, driving up sales tax collections. The money spent by visitors, when they travel, helps support restaurants, lodging properties, retail activities, auto repair and gas stations as well as the attractions, museums and other special sites along the route. These dollars, brought into a community, are a great boost for local businesses in the many small towns along the byways in Ohio.

In closing I respectfully ask that you consider the request to designate May as Drive Ohio Byways Month.

I again thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 117.