



**House Commerce & Labor Committee  
Proponent Testimony – House Bill 669 (Swearingen-LaRe)  
Jason Warner – Manager of Government Affairs, Greater Ohio Policy Center  
Thursday, May 28, 2020**

Chair Manning, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the House Commerce & Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony in support of House Bill 669 – the Business Expansion and Safety Act.

My name is Jason Warner, and I am the Manager of Government Affairs at the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC). GOPC is a statewide, non-partisan not-for-profit whose mission is to improve the communities of Ohio through smart growth strategies and research. Our vision is a revitalized Ohio.

Since March, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way Ohioans live their lives and the way we think about social interactions. While we are slowly opening back up, challenges remain. One aspect that we have been told that will not change however, is the need to socially distance. While it may be easy to do this in some stores and businesses, it remains a challenge for bars and restaurants to safely accommodate customers and staff.

With weather improving, we have the opportunity to enhance available space for bars and restaurants by enacting House Bill 669.

Restaurants and bars are among the most important tenants in Ohio's revitalizing commercial districts. They are what bring longtime residents and new people passing through into our historic downtowns and nearby neighborhoods. Our local restaurants and bars were among the first to relocate into long-vacant buildings, and in many cases, never left, even during the hard times. Particularly in our older neighborhoods and public squares, these small business owners are what makes Ohio's communities so special.

They also face special challenges—they are often in funky old buildings that do not lend themselves to easy Covid-spurred reconfigurations. We must support them as they help offer a much-needed sense of normalcy and community.

Many restaurants have already been able to expand their dining areas to on-site parking, sidewalks, and town squares, but liquor permit restrictions do not allow for the serving of alcoholic beverages in these spaces.

Enactment of House Bill 669 will provide business owners with greater flexibility to expand their business at a time many are working to overcome the challenges imposed by a two-month shutdown, but also to provide customers and employees with a safer, socially-distanced friendly environment.

We would like to thank Representatives Swearingen and LeRe for sponsoring House Bill 669 and for working to find ways to balance the health and safety of our communities while also aiding main street businesses across Ohio. Chair Manning and members of the Commerce &

Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 669 and I welcome any questions the committee may have.