

**Testimony before the Ohio Senate Agriculture Committee
House Bill 669**

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Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 669.

My name is Chris Lane, I am the Vice President of Operations for BASEC Management, Inc., a Wendy's franchise with seven restaurants in Tuscarawas, Stark, and Carroll counties for the last twenty-nine years. My wife and I are second generation owners making us both a woman owned and Veteran owned business. We employ more than 500 people in our restaurants annually accounting for more than 200 full time equivalent positions, many of which are high school or college aged students gaining their first employment experience. We are also proud parents to four children; Lucas(15), Elizabeth(13), Abigail(11), and Addison(7). There is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed our world, our country, our state, and our communities. Both from an economic and social perspective it has been one of the most destructive events in modern times. Businesses have been shuttered. Business models have been forced to evolve or be destroyed. Education delivery and facilitation have been turned on-end. Extracurricular activities such as sports, music, and the arts have been drastically limited or removed entirely from many of our young peoples' lives. Most importantly, the solidification of change and uncertainty as a "new normal" has never been clearer.

I applaud our legislative leaders for recognizing these difficult challenges and springing to action to help address them. Many of the initiatives have made significant positive impacts on businesses, communities, and families. Although we must continue to find creative ways to address these challenges, we cannot do so without also considering the short and long-term impacts that these changes can have on our country, our state, our communities, and our children. Further, we must also consider if the changes that we do make are a permanent solution to a temporary problem. One of the greatest responsibilities I had while serving in the Army, and that I have today as a business owner and father, is to conduct appropriate risk assessments. Specifically, looking at the associated costs, risks, and even contemplating the potential tragic and unthinkable outcomes is a responsibility that we cannot evade nor delegate. Developing appropriate compensating controls, guardrails, and protections is a fundamental responsibility of leaders at all levels. Sometimes the positive impacts and the magnitude of the outcomes require that we accept the risks as presented and move forward. Sometimes the risks are far too great compared to the benefits and we must find another path altogether. Most often, we plan and consult with other subject matter experts to identify a compromise of costs and benefits.

I speak here today in opposition to the dangerous, reckless, and short-sighted benefits of House Bill 669. It would be disingenuous to not acknowledge the positive intent of this legislation for small businesses, but it would also be negligent not to consider the known outcomes and potential risks this legislation

brings to our state, our communities, and our most vulnerable populations. As written this legislation lacks standard consumer protections necessary to protect the most vulnerable amongst us. In Ohio, we are seeing a surge of behavioral health issues, overdose deaths, suicides, and texts to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' Crisis Text Line. Considering these struggles, the last thing our state should do is increase access to a substance that is known to be used as a harmful coping mechanism to the uncertainty, pain, and struggle brought on by this pandemic. Many new sources are reporting that based on CDC information that there is an exponential increase in reported cases of depression and mental health professionals are seeing earlier and greater onset of anxiety because of COVID-19 pandemic. To magnify these problems one of the first responses to this deadly virus has been self-isolation and quarantine. We know that human to human interaction is critical in identifying, preventing, and treating depression and anxiety. I am constantly reminded that 22 veterans commit suicide every day, many times aided by the very system designed to help them. The delivery of anti-depressant medication along with other pain management medications combined with the lack of personal visits creates a tragic combination. Face-to-face assessments and visual recognition create an opportunity to identify the danger signs and risks early.

Very specifically my concerns with House Bill 669 are:

- **Permanent expansion of alcohol home deliveries increases youth access and bypasses safeguards for at risk populations.** The lack of training and oversight of third-party delivery services all but guarantees increased youth access. In a 2012 study it was determined that more than 45% of orders placed by minors were successfully received where more than 50% of them required no age verification at all. There have been wide-spread reports in multiple states including North Carolina, California, and Georgia all who have enacted similar legislation to the proposed House Bill 669. Only one of the three major third-party delivery vendors have applied for and received the necessary H-Permit for Ohio alcohol delivery service. None of these providers have the requisite mandatory ServeSafe alcohol server training requirements that restaurants and bars are required to have by state and local health authorities.
- **The strain on local enforcement agencies, health authorities, and mental health resources is unsustainable.**

In closing, let me reaffirm my opposition to House Bill 669 **as written**. This dangerous, reckless, and permanent expansion of access to alcohol without protections for communities, consumers, and our youth and vulnerable population undermines any economic benefit that may result from its passage. During this global pandemic alcohol sales have increased 55% (beer sales increased 42%; wine sales increased 66%; spirits sales such as tequila, gin, and pre-mixed cocktails increased 75%) under current distribution and sale policies. This legislation was crafted without the engagement and input of the substance abuse, prevention, and treatment community; without the engagement and input of the law enforcement and regulation community; without the mental health and wellness community. I implore you to engage these communities to find and create common-sense protections for communities and consumers before moving this legislation forward.

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