

# ECHO SPIRITS

DISTILLING COMPANY

Joe Bidinger  
Echo Spirits Distilling Co.  
985 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Columbus, OH 43212

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Chairwoman Gayle Manning  
Commerce and Labor Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives

Dear Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

We want to reach out and reiterate our support for HB 669, which we initially submitted in May of this year.

As a small distillery in Columbus, OH, I cannot stress enough how important HB 669 is to our ability to make it through the current crisis. Echo Spirits Distilling Co. has been an in-progress dream for several years, and in October 2019, we turned our stills on for the first time to make spirits for Ohioans. We steadily grew our operations over the following months, investing heavily into launching our cocktail bar. By early March 2020, we estimated we were only weeks away from opening our doors to the public. The pandemic, and by extension the bar and restaurant shutdowns, have ground that process to a halt. With City and State agencies operating remotely and adapting to running business differently, the last six months have been an incredibly slow grind toward opening our bar. We have continued to employ our bar manager over the past six months at the expense of taking salaries ourselves. We feel responsibility for and loyalty toward our lone employee, as many small businesses do.

Though the economy is beginning the process of “reopening”, it is not in the way we knew it before the pandemic. Bars and restaurants are seeing reduced revenue, and we expect that to continue for the foreseeable future. Most are keeping their finances tight and are unwilling to try new products at this time, particularly when it comes to buying a new bottle which doesn’t have a menu placement and may risk sitting on the shelf. Thus, granting distilleries, breweries, bars, restaurants, etc. any means of doing what they can to remain in business is the only responsible course of action to take. The financial impacts of this closure will be seen for years to come, not just over the past six months or the rest of this year. We all have a long recovery ahead, and these changes must be made permanent to allow for the viability of our businesses.

Specifically – the people of Ohio have shown that to-go cocktails can be responsibly made, transported, and consumed at home. Many people will have a cocktail, beer, or glass of wine at home with a takeout

meal and providing those businesses the opportunity to provide that to their customers increases revenue and allows them to create a full experience.

Allowing expansion of serving areas into adjacent outdoor areas increases viable seating area when we are in most need of it. Many breweries and distilleries, like us, are in small spaces. Adhering to social distancing rules, as we should, will cause an extreme stress on our seating capacity. Most business models like ours rely on having a certain number of seats to be viable. At even 50% capacity, it would be a struggle to pay for the basic needs of the business like turning the lights on for the day – the overhead is simply too great. By being able to expand outdoors, we can fulfill this need and give customers the experience they desire.

To be frank, my distillery may not be viable at this scale unless this bill passes. Our bar is where our stability will come from over the next few months of growth. Further, bars and restaurants are our primary customers, not individual consumers. Allowing them to thrive allows us to thrive. If this bill does not pass, our investments into this business plan may wind up costing us the business entirely.

Finally, it is imperative that all businesses of this kind – distilleries, breweries, wineries, bars, and restaurants – all be able to take advantage of these measures. We are all in this together, and the playing field must be level. Though I own a distillery, I want our friends in other, related industries to do well. As a consumer, I also want to be able to take advantage of what they have to offer me, and the pandemic has made that a challenge.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. This bill must pass for the viability of the service industry, and must be passed quickly and without complicating amendments.

Joe Bidinger  
Founder, Echo Spirits Distilling Co.