

Testimony of John T. Coats, II
Pastor, Metropolitan Church of God in Christ and
President, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Columbus and Vicinity
before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer and Ranking Minority Member O'Brien and members of the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify against House Bill 674.

Our organization represents thousands of parishioners in Central Ohio of diverse Christian denominations and ministries. While each of us has his or her own opinions regarding the sale and consumption of alcohol, we have all seen the negative effects on families and communities when alcohol is sold and consumed irresponsibly. Making alcohol available on all days and at all times of day is a recipe for increased pain and suffering in many communities.

While we are opposed to sweeping changes that make alcohol more widely available as we see in House Bill 674, we are specifically opposed to three provisions of the bill. We do not want to see hours of on-premise alcohol sales increased to 4:00 a.m., even on Friday and Saturday night. We do not see the need to create an option for bars to stay open all night long. And we do not want a blanket extension of alcohol sales to include Sundays.

Proponents of alcohol sales have said that Sunday should be treated like any other day. It is my fervent intention that it never be so. While it is the Lord's Day for our members and others of the Christian faith, Sunday has long held a special place for all. It is a day of peace, which can be seen in lower Sunday crime statistics in Columbus and elsewhere. It is also a day of rest, where even most businesses selling and serving alcohol operate at reduced hours, and many choose not to operate at all, even when they have the option of doing so. Sunday is a good day, and in many communities, limited alcohol availability makes it a better day.

We understand that voters in particular neighborhoods currently have the right to decide whether or not alcohol sales can be expanded to include Sundays. Many have supported these sales, and many have rejected them. We believe it right and proper that the result of these votes be preserved. We don't believe it proper for the State of Ohio to step in now and to tell us what's right for our people and for our neighborhoods. A process has been put into place in which a vendor of alcohol can get permission from immediate neighbors to sell on Sunday. Many have done so. This process encourages such vendors to pay greater attention to their neighbors and the impact their business has upon them. It encourages accountability, and that's a good thing. This legislative body should not undo it.

Reject House Bill 674 and the expansion of alcohol sales. Leave this decision in the hands of the voters and the communities directly affected. Please consider these thoughts as you deliberate, and thank you again for the opportunity to make our voices heard.

Sincerely,
Pastor John T. Coats, II