

Proponent Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee Re: Sub SB 204

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December 10, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and finance committee members, good afternoon and thank you for your time. My name is Stacey Heaton and I serve as the Executive Director for the Ohio Aviation Association (OAA), a non-profit association which educates, communicates, and advocates for airports that serve Ohioans. I am pleased to be here before you to discuss aviation in Ohio.

Firstly, I would be remiss to not thank you again for the increase to the airport improvement fund in the latest Operating Budget. Our members were pleased that the State continues to recognize the importance of airport infrastructure to the overall economic vitality of the State.

I am here today in support of Sub. S.B. 204, authorizing the creation of airport development districts in the State of Ohio. As you may recall, during the latest Operating Budget process, in addition to increasing the airport improvement fund, the OAA sought air service development funding. We shared stories of what other States are doing to attract and maintain air service, but we were not successful in our request. Nevertheless, we will continue to educate the General Assembly on the importance of such funding.

Here is the crux of the issue: air service development funding must be viewed as an investment for the long-term viability of Ohio's current and future potential businesses. Air service development funding must not be viewed as a one-and-done investment, but a longer-term investment for the success of the State. Frequent, reliable, right-sized, air service is not only important to for-profit businesses but also important to higher education institutions, research institutions, the tourism industry, the healthcare industry, and every other thriving industry in Ohio. Flights to get business travelers to/from their destinations quickly saves them time; and as we all know, time is money. Just recently we were apprised of a new supporter: Ohio Society of CPA's. They see improved air service as crucial to improving the utilization of staff in reaching clients and returning home quickly, preferably the same day. This obviously speaks to domestic service needs; however, international flights are important as well.

Regarding the softer side of the investment equation, students, families, and professionals alike see access to frequent and reliable air service is an important factor in work-life balance decisions. Talent attraction efforts of the State can be helped with improved air service. Anecdotal research indicates that the up-and-coming generations are more likely to travel and seek experiences abroad all of which could be touted if the State would view air service as a continued investment.

So, you might ask, how do these issues play into the airport development district before us today? The required investments for improved air service are a challenge for airports to shoulder alone for something that benefits all communities and citizens of the State. Recently, JobsOhio announced a strategic focus on airports. This is fantastic news, however, coming up with a local match to accept the JobsOhio funds can still be challenging, especially with the many revenue-use restrictions the FAA puts upon airports. The bill before you adds a great tool to an airport's toolbox to better serve their communities. With these types of tools, airports can help the State to combat the lack of awareness of Ohio as a business destination, as outdated, and as having low cultural diversity.¹

In closing, Ohio's diverse system of airports include commercial service, cargo, and general aviation airports. Your airports connect citizens, businesses, and communities to destinations around the US and the world while providing significant economic impacts to Ohio's economy. Airports help connect Ohio to the future, the innovators, and the investors. Thank you again for the support you have shown to-date, especially Senators Schuring and Sykes, the bill Sponsors. Thank you again for the opportunity to present testimony before you and the opportunity to continue to share how the aviation industry can partner with Ohio leaders to help make Ohio stronger.

¹ https://www.jobsohio.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FINAL-Board-Meeting-Presentation-September-30-2019-Lima_DRAFT.pdf