

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and the honorable members of the House State and Local Government Reform Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of HB90 today. My name is Aaron Crater. I am a professional bartender of nearly 15 years, and the founder of Ohio Barhop, advocating on behalf of Ohio's service industry professionals that work in the bar and restaurant industry. I founded Ohio Barhop in early August after Governor DeWine instituted the 10pm alcohol sales curfew through the Ohio Liquor Control Commission on July 31, because I saw how devastating this action would be for my industry, and that organizations like the Ohio Restaurant Association and the Ohio Licensed Beverage Association were not standing up for us.

My industry has been hit harder than many in the last year. We were one of the first to get shut down. On March 15, Governor DeWine shut down bars and restaurants putting many of Ohio's nearly 600,000 service industry workers out of work. I was out of work for 5 months, and many of my colleagues across the state faced similar situations. When we were finally allowed to re-open, very strict guidelines were placed on us which further limited our ability to work and earn a living.

On July 31, the Governor put bars and restaurants under a 10PM alcohol sales curfew that was to last 120 days until November 28, removing the most profitable hours for businesses and workers. As the curfew neared its end, the Governor instituted a new blanket curfew for all businesses, mandating that they close to the public at 10PM. He carved out special exceptions to this curfew for essential businesses such as grocery stores and pharmacies. To me, it was very clear that the Governor's intent was to skirt legislative oversight by the JCARR committee, in order to keep bars and restaurants closed. As a result of this we have seen many of our bars and restaurants simply go out of business permanently, while he continued to grant variances to this curfew to big businesses, including sports stadiums.

Just 2 days before the Governor enacted his 10PM blanket curfew, he put his medical advisory team on a press conference for the entire state to see, to discuss the spread of COVID throughout our state. They all stated that they were not seeing spread of COVID at bars and restaurants, but rather at private gatherings. Against the best advice of his own team of experts, he still forced us under his oppressive curfew. Through this entire year, enduring 2 months of closures and over 6 months of curfew restrictions, the bar and restaurant industry has complied with what has been asked of us, even though it has cost many their life savings, jobs, futures, and even homes.

From the very beginning, our Governor has told us that bars and restaurants are dangerous environments for people to be in, but has never backed that up with any evidence. The reason is that evidence does not exist. Ohioans are not getting sick in our bars and restaurants. There is virtually no contact tracing data that shows infections are happening in our safe and clean establishments, yet the Governor continues to demonize and attack us. The Governor continued to lie about the danger of bars and restaurants on his press conference last Thursday, saying that “restaurants and bars by their very nature have spread”, and that there was clear evidence of that – still refusing to provide that evidence. If the Governor has evidence that is so compelling, why won't he share it, and why would he lift the curfew? He has no such evidence, but has continued to use us as his scapegoat, threatening the potential of another curfew or shutdown. HB90 will help to ensure these baseless actions will not happen, by requiring the Governor and the Ohio Department of Health to report to the legislature any actions taken in response to an emergency, forcing them to justify with evidence, the actions that they are taking.

We can no longer afford to live under the rule of a single man. This method of governance is not the way our state is intended to run, and the results have been disastrous. Ohioans have been calling for our legislature to take action to reign in our out of control Governor for 11 months now, and no significant action has been taken yet. With SB311 failing to cross the finish line last year, we are losing confidence in our legislature. If the General Assembly fails in this effort again, it will be a stark reminder to Ohioans that our legislature sees itself as both impotent and irrelevant. What is the point of having a representative legislature, if they are not acting in the interests of their constituents, and providing oversight to the executive?

It is time to restore order to our state, by placing checks and balances back in place, and have our legislature involved in the decision making process as a co-equal branch of government once again. I strongly urge you to vote in favor of HB90, to bring back order and prosperity to our great state. Thank you so much for your time today, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.