

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of the Ohio-Israel Ag & Clean Tech Initiative (OIACI) and to ask for your support of the Initiative's amendment to the state operating budget (HB 110).

The OIACI is a program of the Negev Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization based in Cleveland. The Initiative promotes trade opportunities, boosts business attraction, and facilitates technology transfer between Ohio and Israel in the agriculture, food, and Clean-Tech water industries. Throughout the program's 17 years in existence, more than \$100 million has been tracked in direct trade revenue to Ohio. Currently, the OIACI is the only state-specific organization of its kind in the entire country.

The Initiative aims to benefit Ohio's economy, environment, and communities through the facilitation of trade, business attraction, tech transfer, and education between Israel and Ohio. Aligned with increasing concerns over algal blooms, water infrastructure, and ecological health, the OIACI supports the state's agricultural and water/clean-tech industry growth. A few examples of our work include:

- Combatting harmful algal blooms with floating biocides developed by Israel's BlueGreen Water Technologies in partnership with Ohio-based manufacturers, distributors, and universities
- Improving crop yield while lowering the requirement for fertilizers through demonstrations with Israel's Groundwork BioAg's biological product in partnership with Ohio farmers
- A joint venture between Israel's third largest cheese producer, Gad Dairy, and Ohio's Troyer Specialty Foods to create Ezra's Dairy, which produces feta cheese for distribution nationwide

The OIACI has received funding through the biennial budget process for the past 16 years (the last eight years through Development Services Agency) but has historically not been included in the as-introduced version. The legislature has continued to see value in the innovative technology, indispensable partnerships, and significant returns provided by the OIACI. In order to continue supporting Ohio's communities, we are requesting **\$350,000 per fiscal year** (for a total of \$700,000) through the state budget for this important trade collaboration between Ohio and Israel. This is an additional \$150,000 per FY from the House's proposed budget.

The increase in our budget ask from the last biennium (\$300,000 per FY) reflects our intention to expand the workforce development initiatives of the program. We hope to increase the academic research and public-private partnership aspect of the OIACI by offering Ohio students from colleges and universities the opportunity to travel to Israel, develop meaningful relationships, and bring back innovative design ideas to benefit their communities.

Inclusion of this funding in the state budget not only reaffirms the legislature's prioritization of improving Ohio's agricultural and ecological sectors, but also positions Ohio to lead the country – and world – in development and technology to benefit our communities. We respectfully request your support for this amendment to HB 110, and look forward to our continued partnership.