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Ways and Means: Vice Chair

Jack Daniels State Representative

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Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify with my joint-sponsor, Representative Klopfenstein, on House Bill 661. I am proud to advocate for a measure that ensures consumer transparency and protects both businesses and consumers from misleading marketing practices in the food industry. This bill is a vital step forward for Ohio's agricultural and business communities.

The cost of groceries has surged by 25% in the past two years, making it more crucial than ever for consumers to know exactly what they are buying. As innovations with food production continue to develop, we must not lose sight of protecting our consumers and the traditional food industries. This bill addresses the critical issue of misleading labels that fail to differentiate traditional animal-based products from lab-grown alternatives. Allowing products like cell-cultivated meats to be labeled simply as "chicken breast" or "egg whites" without clear indication of their production method deceives consumers and minimizes trust in Ohio's food producers.

The need for clear labeling is especially urgent as the marketplace for alternative proteins continues to drastically expand. Presently, lab-grown meat products are not distinctly labeled, putting traditional meat producers at a disadvantage. House Bill 661 ensures that both traditional and alternative meat producers operate on a level playing field, enabling consumers to make informed choices. For businesses, this transparency is crucial to maintaining consumer confidence and market competitiveness. When Ohio consumers buy food, they expect to get what they paid for—whether it's chicken, beef, or pork. When that expectation is violated by mislabeled products, the consequences can be severe, from eroded consumer confidence to the collapse of small businesses. Clear and accurate labeling is the solution.

House Bill 661 is not a novel idea, as the practice of protecting the consumer and upholding companies to transparency and honesty has been around for decades. From, cosmetics to pharmaceuticals,

there are current federal and state provisions preventing products from being misleading. For example, the Fair Packaging & Labeling Act, a safeguard for consumer rights and fair competition among businesses, was established in 1967. The Act ensures product packaging and labels provide accurate, standardized, and easily understood information. We have always believed in free and fair business practices for businesses, and must ensure as the world modernizes, we modernize with it. Niche food markets, such as a lab grown protein, were not fathomable five decades ago. It is our responsibility now to hold these new products to the standard of traditional food.

Don't get it scrambled, House Bill 661 accomplishes this goal by requiring clear labeling for cell-cultivated meats and other alternative proteins. It ensures informed consumer decisions while protecting Ohio's agricultural businesses, who deserve a marketplace where their products are properly represented. With rising food prices, increasing market complexity, and the growth of new protein sources, it's crucial that Ohio's food industries remain grounded in transparency, honesty, and fairness.

I strongly believe this legislation will help create a balanced and sunny-side up economy in Ohio—one that fosters growth and innovation while maintaining consumer trust and supporting local agriculture. I urge you to support House Bill 661 for the benefit of both Ohio's businesses and consumers, and am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack K. Daniels". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jack" being more prominent than the last name "Daniels".

Jack K. Daniels

State Representative- Ohio's 32nd House District