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**Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells**  
**Assistant Minority Leader**  
**Ohio House District 1**

Chairman Johnson, Vice-Chair Manchester, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the Commerce and Labor Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 96, legislation that would increase the minimum wage in the State of Ohio.

Today, we stand at a crossroads, facing a pivotal moment for countless families across our great state. The economic challenges confronting Ohioans are not abstract numbers or distant concerns; they are the daily struggles of parents deciding between putting food on the table and paying rent, of workers pulling double shifts just to keep the lights on, and of young people burdened by student debt while earning wages that scarcely cover basic living expenses.

This is more than a policy issue; it is a moral imperative. The people of Ohio deserve better. They deserve a wage that reflects their hard work, dedication, and the rising costs of living that strain their budgets. As a child, I witnessed my mother juggle multiple jobs, constantly battling to make ends meet. Her story is not unique. It is echoed in every corner of our state, in urban centers and rural communities alike.

House Bill 96 is a beacon of hope for these families. It proposes to raise the basic state minimum wage rate to \$11.00 per hour when the bill is initially enacted. To get to the proposed \$15.00 minimum wage, the bill outlines a plan to incrementally raise the minimum wage by \$1.00 each year for the next four years. This gradual increase is designed to give businesses time to adjust while steadily improving the economic realities for our workers.

Additionally, H.B. 96 addresses the wage disparity faced by tipped employees. The Minimum Wage Amendment of the Ohio Constitution currently allows these workers to be paid less than half the basic state minimum wage rate, provided their tips bring them up to the full minimum wage. This bill eliminates this exception, ensuring that tipped employees receive the full wage rate applicable under the bill, recognizing their invaluable contribution to our economy.

From January 1, 2029, onward, H.B. 96 requires that minimum wage rates be adjusted annually based on the Consumer Price Index, in accordance with Ohio's constitutional requirements. This adjustment ensures that wages keep pace with inflation, protecting the purchasing power of our workers year after year.

The numbers speak for themselves. A 2019 Policy Matters Ohio report found that increasing Ohio's minimum wage to \$15 would elevate wages for some 2 million Ohio workers, nearly 37 percent of the wage-earning workforce. The average affected worker would take home an additional \$4,252 annually. This increase is not just about lifting wages; it is about restoring dignity, fairness, and economic justice to our workforce.

We cannot ignore the stark reality: since 1979, productivity has risen six times faster than hourly compensation for the typical U.S. worker. This disconnect is unsustainable and unjust. By supporting H.B. 96, we are taking a stand against this inequity, affirming that the prosperity of Ohio depends on the well-being of its workers.

I urge you all to consider the profound impact this bill will have on the lives of Ohioans. Supporting House Bill 96 means supporting families, fostering economic stability, and building a future where hard work is justly rewarded.

That's how I believe we can build an Ohio for all of us.

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this important bill and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.