



OHIO HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION  
175 S. THIRD ST. SUITE 170  
COLUMBUS, OH 43215  
P: (614) 461-6462

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**Testimony to the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee  
for House Bill 385 • May 7, 2024**

Joe Savarise, President & CEO • Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown and members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of House Bill 385, which will take important steps to assist victims of the insidious crime of human trafficking on their journeys to recovery and self-sufficiency.

The Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association represents thousands of owners, operators, managers, and employees across the state, as well as hundreds of companies that make brick-and-mortar investments and provide jobs in Ohio communities. The hotel & lodging industry comprises many franchised businesses as well as many entrepreneurial small business owner-operators. These businesses are largely locally owned and operated, even when they are affiliated with a national brand. A large percentage are family-owned companies. Hotels provide more than 36,000 direct jobs in the state of Ohio with more than \$1.5 billion in wages. Hotel guests spend more than \$11.4 billion annually in Ohio and the industry generates \$1 billion in local, state and federal taxes.

As part of our commitment and efforts in the fight against human trafficking, our industry is working to provide career opportunities to victims of this crime, and those at risk. Our work with victim's advocacy organizations, community agencies, law enforcement and health care professionals has demonstrated that those victimized by trafficking possess a desire to escape the bondage that trafficking entails, improve their lives, and be productive contributors to their communities and to society.

H.B. 385 will help victims of human trafficking, but also will aid the entities working to provide them employment and career opportunities, by expanding eligible offenses for expungement to include misdemeanors and fifth- and fourth-degree felonies.

Expungement of these non-violent offenses is appropriate because an individual would have to prove with clear and convincing evidence that their participation in the offense was a result of having been a victim of human trafficking. Recognizing that individuals who are forced into engaging in commercial sex acts, or coerced into providing labor or services, are victims of a crime is critical to understanding trafficking.

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The Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association and its members are engaged in this fight every day. We develop and conduct training and awareness programs specific to hotels and the different operations and roles within our businesses. We provide protocols, toolkits, resources and materials in multiple languages. We host events to create connections between hotel professionals, victims, and the many agencies working for the same goal. We never charge for any service or product related to eliminating trafficking.

We also work with organizations that are dedicated to providing victims options for pathways to their personal freedom and self-sufficiency. One stellar example is Ohio-based *Freedom a la Cart*, which provides job opportunities and practical skills for victims in an effective workforce development program. It is our industry's commitment, working with organizations such as this, to provide more job opportunities and career paths for those interested in the rewarding and upwardly mobile hospitality sector.

Our organization and its members add their voices in respectfully asking for your thoughtful consideration and support of House Bill 385 and its provisions that address issues that will allow more opportunities for victims of human trafficking, and the Ohio businesses and employers who work with them.

Thank you.



**Joe Savyarise, President & CEO**  
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