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Before the House Criminal Justice Committee

Representative Cindy Abrams, Chair

H.B. 366 Proponent Testimony of Steven N. Berk, MPH
Manager, Government Affairs
Giant Eagle, Inc.

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Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Steven Berk, Manager, Government Affairs for Giant Eagle. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 366, the FORCE Act.

Giant Eagle operates more than 200 supermarkets and fuel and convenience stores in the state and employs 17,000 Ohioans. As one of the state's largest retailers, we are uniquely positioned to comment on how organized retail crime negatively impacts our ability to deliver food, fuel, and pharmacy services to consumers.

Organized retail crime is not a passive crime of opportunity or necessity. In reality, dangerous and diversified criminal enterprises are engaged in elaborate schemes; deftly operating within the current legal gaps that House Bill 366 seeks to address. These criminal rings maneuver around communities and businesses fully aware of the legal limits that hinder prosecution and prevent elevating misdemeanors to felonies.

Sophisticated criminal organizations routinely steal non-perishable items in quantities far exceeding reasonable personal consumption. The items targeted by criminals can easily be fenced either online or at flea and open-air markets. Within our business these products include laundry detergent, batteries, cosmetics, alcohol, and over-the-counter medications.

Organized retail crime is an epidemic that stagnates retail growth and hurts our ability to invest back into our communities. In addition to the fresh, high-quality food we make available for purchase in our stores every day, Giant Eagle also annually provides more than 16 million meals to neighbors in need through donations to Ohio's food banks.

Lastly, the greatest motivation for supporting House Bill 366 is the safety of our Team Members, our most valuable asset. Organized retail crime is committed by professional criminals that all too often resort to violence if they encounter store personnel or authorities. Just as we have seen an increase in theft in our stores, we have unfortunately also experienced an increase in violent encounters including the use of weapons.

House Bill 366 will be a substantial step forward in safeguarding Ohio's workforce and business community. Additionally, it will ensure that law enforcement has the resources they need to pursue and prosecute retail crime thefts. Thank you Chairwoman Abrams and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee for allowing me to voice our support for the FORCE Act. We encourage its swift favorable passage out of this committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steven N. Berk, MPH
Giant Eagle, Inc.
700 Cranberry Woods Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
Cell: 740-505-2026 / Email: steven.berk@giant eagle.com

