



**Consal Oinigh na hÉireann
Honorary Consul of Ireland**

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Written Testimony in Support of HB 455

Dear Members,

As the (first) Honorary Consul of Ireland in Ohio, I am honored to express my wholehearted support for HB 455, to enact section 149.60 of the Revised Code to establishment the Ohio Ireland Trade Commission. This initiative stands as a landmark proposal to enhance our robust economic relationships and to foster increased collaboration, innovation, and mutual prosperity between Ohio and Ireland.

The Irish have made significant contributions to a variety of industries, which have helped to shape the Ohio economy. Irish immigrants played a significant role in the iron and steel industries in towns like Cleveland and Youngstown, laboring in factories and mills that were essential to the state's economic growth. Many Irish immigrants worked in the coal mining areas of southeast Ohio, contributing to the expansion of the state's energy industry. Irish business owners founded everything from restaurants and bars to construction firms in cities like Cincinnati, boosting the local economy and offering vital services to their communities.

The labor provided by Irish immigrants, often in challenging and demanding conditions, played a significant role in the growth of Ohio's transportation infrastructure, including canals, railroads, and later, highways. Overall, the industrious spirit and hard work of the Irish immigrants were instrumental in driving the economic expansion of Ohio during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Ohio has a long history of important contributions from several Irish immigrants. James M. Cox, who was born in Ohio to parents who immigrated from Ireland, is one famous person. After serving as Ohio's 46th governor from 1913 to 1915, Cox was nominated by the Democratic Party for president of the United States in the 1920 presidential contest. In addition, he founded the media empire Cox Enterprises, which consists of radio, television, and print outlets.

Michael J. Gavin was another well-known Irish immigrant in Ohio who held the position of mayor of Cleveland between 1883 and 1885. During his tenure, Gavin—who was born in Ireland—played a significant role in extending and modernizing Cleveland's infrastructure. He supported efforts for economic development, assisted in the creation of public parks, and pushed for upgrades to the city's water supply.

Co-founder of Procter & Gamble James Gamble is another notable Irish immigrant who made a lasting impression on Ohio. Gamble, who was born in Ireland, emigrated to the US and settled in Cincinnati. In 1837, Gamble and his brother-in-law, William Procter, co-founded Procter & Gamble, which was initially a soap and candle manufacturing company. Procter & Gamble grew its product ranges and rose to prominence as one of the biggest consumer goods corporations in the world under Gamble's direction. Beyond his financial skills, James Gamble left behind a legacy of civic involvement and generosity. His contributions to Cincinnati's education and healthcare systems, among other humanitarian causes, had a long-lasting effect on the city and its citizens.

These people, along with many others, have had a profound impact on Ohio's history and development, highlighting the important contributions Irish immigrants have made to the political, economic, and social fabric of the state.

In this era of increasing connectivity, the establishment of the Ohio Ireland Trade Commission could not come at a better moment. This commission is a proactive move that will help to leverage the current strong flows of investment and trade between our two areas. Ireland, with its strategic location in

Europe and dedication to technological innovation, and Ohio, with its varied economy and robust industrial base, make for ideal partners. Through the Ohio Ireland Trade Commission, we can formally establish this partnership and open new prospects in biotechnology, technology, agriculture, and education.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Ohio Ireland Trade Commission will foster significant opportunities for our institutes of education. Through this commission, we can facilitate the creation of new partnerships, exchange programs, and R&D collaborations that will benefit students and researchers alike. These academic and scientific exchanges will not only enhance the educational experiences of Ohio students but also drive innovation and development in key industries, aligning with both Ohio's and Ireland's strategic interests in education and workforce development.

Our connectivity has already been greatly enhanced by the recent launch of Aer Lingus direct flights (May 2023) from Cleveland to Dublin, which not only effortlessly connect Ohio with Ireland but also offer greater access to European markets. There is a clear need for and possibility for more travel and trade between our two regions, as seen by the positive reception and success of this new service.

This commission would also provide a strategic platform for Ohio companies seeking to enter European markets and help Irish companies take advantage of the enormous prospects in Ohio and the Midwest. It will serve as an indispensable tool for managing the intricacies of global investment and commerce, giving companies in both areas the knowledge and connections they need to be successful.

The bilateral ties that could be strengthened by this commission extend beyond economic benefits. They enhance our cultural and educational bonds, creating a richer, more interconnected global community. This initiative will also serve as a testament to our shared values of entrepreneurship, innovation, and mutual respect.

Additionally, Ohio businesses and organizations seeking to conduct business in Europe can benefit greatly from Ireland's status as the only English-speaking nation in the EU. Because of the common language, there are fewer obstacles to entrance and a greater ability for Ohio-based enterprises to conduct business in European markets. Similarly, Ohio's booming business ecosystem, skilled workforce, and strategic position make it a perfect partner for Irish companies looking to establish a foothold in the US.

In supporting the Ohio Ireland Trade Commission, we are not just promoting economic growth; we are fostering a deeper international fellowship. I urge you to endorse this proposal, recognizing the profound and positive impact it will have on our state's and our partner's futures.

Thank you for considering this transformative opportunity to deepen the ties between Ohio and Ireland.

Sincerely,

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

Mark Owens

Honorary Consul of Ireland in Ohio