



**House State and Local Government Committee
Testimony of Brian Baldridge, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture
Substitute House Bill 238
December 5, 2023**

Chairwoman John, Vice-Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Substitute House Bill 238 pertaining to occupational licensure reform.

I write to you today to specifically address a provision in the Sub. Bill that decreases the annual inflatable ride permit fee from \$225 per inflatable ride to \$25 per inflatable ride. The Sub. Bill additionally makes significant changes to the financial structure of inflatable ride inspection and reinspection fees.

It is ODA's mission to protect all Ohio consumers. Our dedicated team inspects the food, animals, and plants – and – amusement rides across the state of Ohio to uphold this mission. To do so, ODA's Amusement Ride Safety program has ten full-time inspectors who regularly perform more than 4,400 inspections across the state annually. These inspections include theme parks, the portable rides at your county fairs, and inflatable rides. ODA's ARS program provides a safe ride experience for Ohio's families.

In consultation with our Amusement Ride Safety Division at ODA, we have carefully researched the immediate budgetary implications of this proposal. The revenue cuts contained in the Sub. Bill would result in an annual loss of approximately \$500,000. This represents an approximate 25% annual decrease in the Division's entire budget.

If this proposal in the Sub. Bill were enacted into law, ODA would likely look at layoffs for our amusement ride inspectors. Such layoffs would jeopardize ODA's ability to inspect amusement rides due to staff reductions.

This is, quite frankly, all about safety. Ohio has been a leader in ride safety, especially since the passage of Tyler's Law in 2019. ODA has successfully built our amusement ride inspections team back up to the necessary levels after the challenges faced beginning in 2020. In fact, this General Assembly's Main Operating Budget (HB 33) allows ODA to hire an additional inspector. The Department would be unable to do so if this proposal remains in the Sub. Bill. We believe the potential layoffs would be four inspectors, or 40% of existing inspectors to maintain a balanced budget.

More inspectors mean more inspections and more inspections mean safer rides. Reducing Ohio's inspection staff to six inspectors would mean that only six inspectors would be responsible for inspecting three thousand rides annually; inspecting the rides at each of Ohio's 94 county and

independent fairs; and opening our large amusement parks including Cedar Point, Kings Island, and the Columbus Zoo. Supplemental inspections would be dramatically reduced meaning that nearly all amusement rides undergo only a single inspection annually. A team of six inspectors would be hard pressed to perform the 4,400 inspections performed this year. With our current staff, inspectors will begin their duties for major amusement rides in March. Reducing the number of inspectors now would have incredible implications for the upcoming year.

All amusement rides, including inflatables, undergo a thorough inspection by our inspectors to ensure that the rides follow both national and manufacture specific standards for design, operation, and maintenance. Inspectors routinely document safety compliance orders (orders to correct certain flaws in the inflatable device) to protect the public who wish to enjoy the inflatables. Typically, these areas of highest concern are Anchoring Systems; Operational Issues; Inflatable Materials; and Blower Motors. Since 2022, ODA has issued over 600 safety compliances on inflatable devices alone. When compared to the number of inflatables permitted during this time, this represents that nearly 20% of inflatables were not in compliance with applicable safety standards at the time of inspection.

Inspecting inflatables is important. A recent study posted in the Journal of Pediatric Surgery (Vukceovich, 2022) showed that injuries involving inflatables have increased every year since 2000. With many of these injuries involving children six years and younger. The inspections and operator training required by ODA help to limit these injuries. Ohio's inspectors offer a safety service and quality customer service to ensure each inflatable across the state is properly maintained and secure.

Lastly, I truly appreciate the work this committee is undertaking. I would commit to you that, as Director, I am certainly willing to continue conversations about inflatable fees and how they are structured in the upcoming budgetary process. However, this change in the Sub. Bill would not allow for the opportunity to explore alternative options for revenue replacement. It would instead force a reduction in our inspection staff and risk the safety of the public who enjoy these rides year-round. As I said before, more inspectors mean more inspections. More inspections mean safer rides. It is my sincere hope that Ohio can continue to be a leader in ride safety.

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention to my testimony.