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House State and Local Government Committee

House Bill 497 – Proponent Testimony

Chris Abbuhl, CCAO President and Tuscarawas County Commissioner

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Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 497, the county “clean up” bill. My name is Chris Abbuhl. I’m a Tuscarawas County Commissioner and currently serve as the President for the County Commissioners Association of Ohio.

House Bill 497 updates the Revised Code to address administrative burdens that create inefficiencies in county government. These “clean up” items are intended to be relatively mundane but will have a positive impact on county operations. I’d like to highlight a few of these provisions for the committee today.

As this committee is aware, county commissioners are responsible for the upkeep, renovation, and construction of jails as well as the county courthouse. Many counties across the state are undergoing jail or courthouse renovations, or even constructing new county jails. Currently, the construction process requires review and sign off from a committee of elected officials for any projects or change orders of any amount. House Bill 497 will require this process for anything over \$25,000. Jail construction in particular is often time sensitive and it is sometimes difficult to coordinate the schedules of the committee to meet quickly. Thus, adding this threshold will make these public improvement projects more timely and efficient.

In addition to relieving administrative burdens, this bill also updates the code to reflect the inflationary environment of today. For example, under current law, the county prosecuting attorney must review and certify all contracts \$1,000 or higher. House Bill 497 would increase this threshold, which has not been updated since 1953, to \$20,000.

The bill also streamlines the process for the county to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete personal property and increases the threshold for these donations to \$5,000. House Bill 497 requires that, if donating, the organization must be a 501(a) or 501(c)(3) organization in Ohio and provide evidence of that status.

House Bill 497 reflects input from commissioners, county staff, and other county elected officials. CCAO appreciates Representative Stewart and Representative Klopfenstein’s efforts and the collaboration with county elected officials associations to put together a bill that will improve the way we all deliver services to the citizens of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

