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**Senate General Government Committee  
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 33 (Edwards)  
Prepared by: Casey Kozlowski, Ashtabula County Commissioner  
Wednesday, May 10, 2023**

Chair Rulli, Vice-Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33, regarding the state's main operating budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Casey Kozlowski, and I serve as President of the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners. I am writing to you today to offer my support for an amendment that I'd like the Senate General Government Committee to consider as part of this bill.

The amendment is rather simple in nature and would further amend Ohio Revised Code Section 5739.09, as it relates to Convention Facilities Authorities and grant authority to a board of county commissioners that levies a tax under division (A) of this section to do either or both of the following:

First, that revenue shall be pledged and contributed both to a convention facilities authority to pay the costs of constructing, expanding, maintaining or operating one or more convention centers in the county, including paying bonds, or notes in anticipation of bonds, and to a convention and visitors bureau to pay the costs of promoting one or more convention centers in the county.

The second, which is the proposed amendment, would allow for the revenue that is pledged and contributed to a convention facilities authority to be allocated to a public or nonprofit organization to pay for constructing, expanding, maintaining, or operating a facility that enhances tourism with the county.

The crux for this is twofold.

First, Ashtabula County was successful in receiving debt relief on the Geneva Lodge and Conference Center which is one of the only state lodges on state park property that has been paid for entirely by the county and in this case is also owned and operated by the county. With this relief from the state, the funds that have historically been generated by the Ashtabula County Convention Facilities Authority, which are assessed through a 2% lodging tax and that total approximately \$600,000 on an annual basis, are no longer necessary to be used exclusively towards debt service on the facility.

Therefore, it is to my second point, and why I am here today and that is to seek this modification to allow for the Ashtabula County CFA to continue it's work in using bed tax dollars to further grow and enhance Ashtabula County's flourishing tourism industry.

The manner in which the legislature granted the authority years ago to assess the CFA bed tax, was rather limited in its authorized uses. I am merely asking that we have the ability to use the funds in a manner that is consistent with other convention facilities authorities throughout the state of Ohio.

With this modification, the CFA will be in a position to support projects such as investments in Ashtabula County's lakeshore with enhancements to our Ashtabula Bridge Street area, Conneaut Port District or the like, enhancements to grow our thriving Grand River Valley wine region, investments in our county's parks, and also improvements to our small downtowns, among many other endeavors. Each of these investments would be centered on bringing more people to our county, spending time at any number of our hotels, which in returns brings in additional revenue to support event more investment in our communities.

I want to be clear that the goal with these funds is to make investments in brick and mortar projects. I'm very cognizant that we are talking about bed tax dollars, so we want to ensure that these funds are being put to good use helping to grow an industry that creates an environment for more people to spend the night at any one of our lodging establishments. Because we know when they do that, they spend money at our local restaurants, retail establishments and the like.

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for your time and attention to this matter. This amendment would mean quite a bit to Ashtabula County and it's my hope that the committee will please consider this in House Bill 33.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Regards,

Casey Kozlowski  
Ashtabula County Commissioner