



Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for affording me this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 266.

My name is Stephen Hightower II and I serve as the Chief Operating Officer of Hightowers Petroleum.

Like many in our industry I represent a small family-owned business, we employ over 50 people and we invest and give back to our hometown, Middletown, OH.

When my grandfather started our company in 1956 it was a janitorial business, which was a good business back then. As years have gone by, however, we have continued to adapt, change, and grow to meet the shifting times and needs of our customers.

Today, Hightowers Petroleum Company is one of the largest independent fuel distributors in the United States, delivering a load of fuel every 7 minutes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are also proud members of the Ohio Energy and Convenience Association (OECA), which represents all segments of the fuel and convenience supply chain.

Once again, we have sensed the winds of change and have jumped into the burgeoning electric vehicle market, with Hightower EV. At this stage it's an investment that we are confident will pay off if the playing field is open and free market principles prevail.

There are major goals in the attempt to go electric and reduce the amount of carbon pollution, which I support. But for it to be successful, it will require participation of the most reliable and efficient distribution network – retail fuel stations.

We embrace the change but as small business owners we must see a path of return on our investment. Even with current incentives, EV charging stations are a considerable investment with precious limited space. Retailers are already reimagining the convenience store of the future where you have a place to recharge your mind and body while your electric vehicle powers up.

As we consider this legislation there are things, in our opinion, that this body should prioritize:

- Ohio should encourage private investment and free market approaches as it seeks to expand its EV infrastructure. The state should avoid artificial regulatory or legislative barriers that might keep retailers and other industries from participating in this process.
- Ohio should avoid charging businesses and citizens with the cost of building EV infrastructure via demand charges and subsidies. These added costs would discourage private investment while having an adverse impact on the overall business climate of the state.
- Utilities will obviously play a crucial role in this process and fuel retailers are ready to work with them in a collaborative manner to ensure Ohio builds the most robust and efficient EV infrastructure possible.

We are pleased to support SB 266 because it aligns with the above-mentioned goals. In addition, we sincerely appreciate Sen. Reineke for bringing the bill forward. As the world rapidly changes, we must remain true to our free market principals. Small and family-owned businesses and the thousands of families that work with us are counting on it.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.