



Chairman Creech, Vice Chair Newman, Ranking Member Miller and all members of the House Agriculture Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments today. These comments are in response to testimony from the Ohio Department of Commerce on February 20, 2025 as it relates to hemp products. The Ohio Healthy Alternatives Association (OHAA) represents retailers, manufacturers and distributors of hemp products in the state. We are committed to advocating for reasonable regulations on this market that allow responsible businesses to thrive, while providing a mechanism to go after the bad actors in the market.

The Department of Commerce's testimony was true in that currently hemp products are lacking regulations. It is also true that the lack of regulations technically allows minors to purchase products and allows untested products to be on the market. However, the solution isn't to implement a blanket ban on hemp products and the solution isn't to only allow products to be sold in marijuana dispensaries. Any proposal to restrict sales of hemp products into marijuana dispensaries will have a significantly negative economic impact on Ohio small businesses. Your local retailers who have invested in store fronts, inventory, employee training, and technology would be forced to cease operating this legal endeavor. These Ohioans would be forced to cede their industry to a federally illegal marijuana enterprise dominated by out of state mega-corporations. We strongly ask this committee to reject this approach.

There are only 135 licensees with a certificate of operation as a marijuana dispensary. Moving hemp to the dispensaries would freeze out all other retailers from the industry. The Ohioans who have made investments in their businesses would not have access to these dispensary licenses, nor would most want them. They don't want to sell marijuana, and their customers don't want to purchase marijuana. The fact remains that hemp products are federally legal, while marijuana remains a scheduled drug federally. Marijuana and hemp are different.

We implore this body to pass reasonable regulations on the hemp industry. This will allow responsible Ohio operators to stay in business, while also protecting consumers from products that are untested and should not be on the market. The OHAA is in support of:

- Age restrictions to purchase hemp. We agree these products should be sold only to adults 21 and over.

- Testing requirements and standards. We agree that manufacturers should be testing hemp products to ensure they aren't laced with other drugs and to test for levels of pesticides and other substances.
- Labeling restrictions. We agree that product packaging shouldn't look like food or candy that directly appeals to children. Further, we support child-resistant packaging to minimize risk of children accessing products.
- Licensing paradigm. We agree the state should know who is selling these products and have a license to revoke if a business is breaking the laws around sales.

Retailers in Ohio have a long history of selling adult use products. There are common sense solutions to target the bad actors in the market, without passing draconian policies that wipe out an entire industry. Most businesses are already adhering to these practices voluntarily. It is the bad actors the state should be focused on. A regulatory scheme that creates a legal framework for operation, paired with enforcement mechanisms will accomplish that.

Please allow Ohio businesses to operate, while creating consumer safety. The state can do both by adopting a regulatory model on hemp products.

Thank you for your consideration.