



**Lorain County
Public Health**

For the Health of Us All

To: Ohio House Agriculture Committee

From: Greg Putka, Director of Environmental Health, Lorain County Public Health

Date: November 4, 2025

RE: HB 134

My name is Greg Putka, and I serve as the Director of Environmental Health at Lorain County Public Health. Our Food Safety Program employs five full-time staff members and licenses approximately 1,600 food facilities within Lorain County. The program staff are responsible for conducting plan reviews for all new and remodeled food service operations, routine inspections, complaint investigations, and foodborne illness outbreak investigations throughout the county.

I appreciate the intent of House Bill 134 to support small-scale entrepreneurs and increase access to locally prepared foods. However, I would like to highlight several challenges with the bill from the perspective of local health authorities responsible for food safety oversight and consumer protection.

House Bill 134 centralizes oversight of all Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations (MEHKO) under the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA). However, local health departments—including Lorain County Public Health—are typically the first responders to complaints involving unsanitary conditions, foodborne illness, or unsafe food handling practices. As a result, even though ODA would hold regulatory authority, local health departments will continue to experience the practical impacts of MEHKO-related complaints, inquiries, and potential illness investigations.

Addressing issues and concerns associated with MEHKO will inevitably divert valuable time and resources away from the oversight of our licensed food facilities that already operate within the community. Without clear authority to inspect, investigate, or enforce compliance, local health officials may be unable to respond swiftly or effectively to emerging food safety threats.

Furthermore, with the number of licensed food facilities already under local regulation, local health departments do not have the resources, staffing capacity, or funding to assume additional responsibilities related to MEHKO. This could result in delays in complaint response, slower outbreak investigations, and public confusion about which agency should be contacted for food safety concerns. Inconsistent enforcement and fragmented oversight could ultimately undermine consumer confidence and increase risks to public health.

The legislation allows MEHKO to prepare and sell potentially hazardous foods—including meat, poultry, seafood, and dairy products—provided these items are delivered directly to the consumer. These types of foods are highly time- and temperature-sensitive and require strict controls to prevent bacterial growth and contamination. In a traditional commercial kitchen or licensed food facility, these controls are achieved through



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the use of commercial-grade equipment, routine temperature monitoring, and food safety training that ensure compliance with established public health standards.

In contrast, home kitchens often lack the infrastructure, equipment, and oversight necessary to consistently maintain safe cooling, reheating, and holding temperatures. Even with the “in-person delivery” restriction outlined in HB 134, there remains a significant risk of improper handling, storage, or transport—particularly during warmer months or longer delivery times. These conditions increase the likelihood of foodborne illness outbreaks, which can be difficult to trace back to the source due to the informal nature of home-based operations.

When such incidents occur, local health departments are typically the agencies called upon to investigate complaints, identify the source, and implement public health interventions. This not only increases the workload for food safety staff but also diverts critical resources from the oversight of licensed food facilities. The cumulative effect is greater strain on local programs, potential delays in response, and increased risk to consumer health and safety.

In closing, while the intent of House Bill 134 to support small-scale entrepreneurs and expand access to locally prepared foods is appreciated, it is critical to recognize the significant burden this legislation may place on local health departments. Even without direct regulatory authority, local agencies will continue to receive and respond to complaints, illness reports, and public inquiries related to MEHKOs. Each of these activities demands staff time, technical expertise, and follow-up — all of which draw resources away from the inspection and oversight of licensed food facilities that already exist within our communities.

The added workload, coupled with limited staffing and funding, could lead to delays in complaint response, slower outbreak investigations, and reduced capacity to address other essential public health functions. This strain on local health resources ultimately increases the risk to consumer safety and public confidence in Ohio’s food protection system.

As this bill moves forward, I urge consideration of these operational and resource impacts to ensure that any new framework for home-based food operations does not unintentionally compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of local public health efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and for your ongoing commitment to protecting the health and safety of Ohio residents.

Sincerely,

Greg Putka