



OHIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Matt MacLaren
Director of Travel and Tourism Policy
Ohio Chamber of Commerce
Ohio, The Heart of It All, Testimony
March 5, 2025

Chair Miller, Vice Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today about advertising Ohio, The Heart of It All, as a great place to visit, live, and work.

My name is Matt MacLaren, and I am the Director of Travel and Tourism Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. I have over 20 years of experience in the tourism industry. I have been CEO of the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association, a Senior Vice President with the American Hotel & Lodging Association, and I served for nearly six years as Ohio state tourism director for both Governor Kasich, and Governor DeWine, before joining the Ohio Chamber of Commerce in the summer of 2023.

The Ohio Chamber is the Ohio's leading business advocate, and we represent over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio including many members in Ohio's travel and tourism industry. We are supportive of Ohio's tourism industry because "Sense of Place", which is making and showing Ohio as a desirable place to live, work, and visit, is a key lever that we identify in the Ohio Chamber of Commerce [Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future](#). Marketing Ohio as a great place will help our state attract the visitors, residents, and workers that our businesses and our economy need to thrive.



Tourism is a \$56 billion industry in Ohio, and it is growing. But it is more than a major economic generator; it is a gateway for residents and workers to find our state. Last year, Longwoods International released a study that showed that 2/3 of recent movers visited their new hometowns as leisure travelers before deciding to work there.

Why Increase Tourism Marketing: Visitors Become Residents and Workers




It All Starts with a Visit

Among those travelers who moved to a new location in the past three years, 67% of them reported they had visited their new hometowns as a leisure visitor prior to moving there.

*- Longwoods International, American Travel Sentiment Survey,
August 1, 2023*

Ohio needs more residents, and more workers. Past studies have projected Ohio to decline in population, but I am happy to say that JobsOhio recently projected that our state could grow because of the new jobs we are creating. It is projected that Ohio will need 540,000 STEM and technically certified people over the next 10 years just to fill the new jobs that are being created by companies investing in Ohio.



Ohio's population poised to grow thanks to new employers, JobsOhio CEO Nauseef says

JP Nauseef Guest Columnist The Columbus Dispatch

Published 5:32 a.m. ET Nov. 21, 2024 | Updated 9:08 a.m. ET Nov. 21, 2024

According to data from the Census Bureau, from 2019-2023, a net of 97,000 people came to Ohio for job-related reasons. Moreover, a 2024 analysis by Bloomberg reveals that Ohio's 25-44-year-old population from 2020-2023 is stable or increasing in at least three-quarters of the state's counties.

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2024/11/21/ohio-population-wont-shrink-due-to-job-growth-opinion/76429769007/>

In order to help our state grow, we need to competitively market Ohio, the Heart of It All, as a great place to visit, live and work. Right now, we are only spending \$7.5 million a year for TourismOhio, our states marketing agency. The average tourism division budget of states that border Ohio is \$25 million a year.

Why Increase Tourism Marketing: Ohio Has Competition



**Ohio's Tourism Division is funded at
\$7.5 million annually**

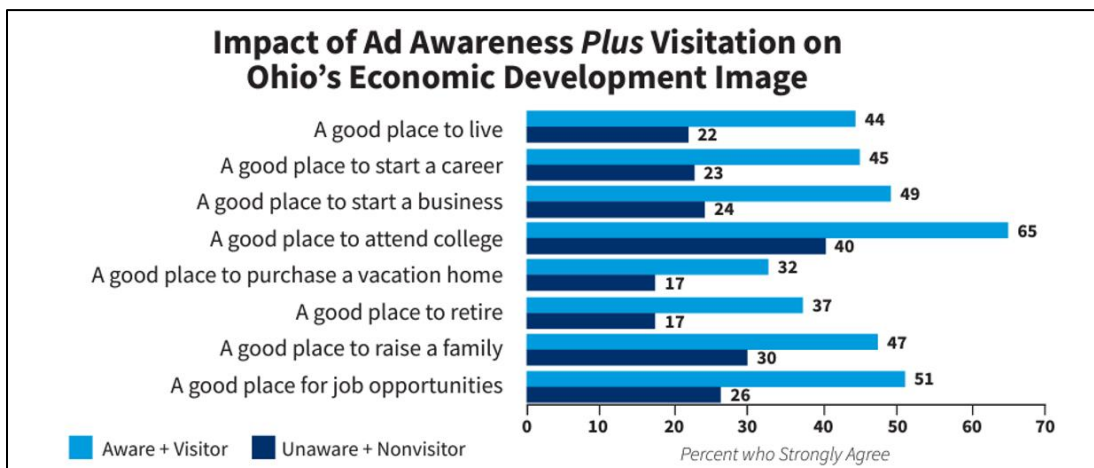
**Average funding for states bordering
Ohio is \$25 million**



Indiana spends \$20 million a year on its “In Indiana” marketing. Michigan spends \$35 million a year on its “Pure Michigan” marketing. And Pennsylvania recently announced an increase in their marketing budget to \$18 million a year including a new \$6 million co-op program and securing more sports and events fund. Moreover, Indiana and Michigan have publicly stated that they are targeting Ohioans with their marketing not only to visit their state, but also to move to their state.

We are in a competition for visitors, residents, and workers. By increasing TourismOhio’s budget we would be able to market in all the states that border Ohio, reinstate a coop marketing program that would attract over \$1 million a year in private investment, market to Ohioans to stay in Ohio, and encourage more people to visit, live, and work in Ohio, the Heart of It All.

The America250 Ohio Commission is also doing great work to bring attention to Ohio as a great place. With proper funding for FY 2026 they will be able to add to Ohio’s message next year about the incredible accomplishments of Ohioans during the 250 years of the United States.



Ohio has a great product! It's not just my opinion, it is what research shows. A 2023 study conducted by the Ohio Department of Development found that once we get a person to visit Ohio their perception of our state doubles as "A good place to live", "A good place to start a career", and "A good place for job opportunities". Their perception of Ohio also greatly increases as "A good place to attend college", "A good place to raise a family", and more.

Ohio, The Heart of It All



It's Ohio's time.
We have the brand: Ohio, The Heart of It All.
We have the jobs.
We have the quality of life.
We have a growing Ohio tourism industry.
It's time to tell our story.








It is Ohio's time. We have the brand, Ohio, the Heart of It All. We have the jobs with Intel, Anduril, Honda's expansion, Joby Aviation, and more recent announcements. We have an excellent quality of life with incredible cities and villages, top retailers and restaurants, good schools, parks and trails, and the world headquarters of nice people in Ashland. And, we have a growing tourism industry with Amish Country, wine country, major sports teams, Lake Erie, Cedar Point and Kings Island, the Cincinnati Open, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and more.

Chair Miller and members of the Arts, Athletes, and Tourism committee, it is time to tell Ohio's story. I thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer any questions.