

April 28, 2025

Chairwoman Miller, Vice Chairman Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and the members of the House Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 138 – the bill that would authorize the creation of tourism promotion districts in Ohio.

My name is Adam Okuley, and I serve as the General Counsel of The Pizzuti Companies. The Pizzuti Companies is a real estate development company that will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary next year. We have been headquartered in Columbus for our entire history, and our current headquarters is located in the Short North Arts District. We see the Short North Arts District as a critical hub for culture and tourism in Columbus, and we have a long history of development in the Short North, highlighted by the Le Meridien Columbus Hotel, known as The Joseph, to go along with three office projects and a 100-unit multifamily project we have developed in the area.

I would like to thank Representatives Dovilla and Santucci for their introduction of this bill. HB 138 provides a critical tool for our local tourism communities to invest in the resources that are needed to compete with markets throughout the country for highly competitive tourism dollars. Specifically, this legislation would permit a local community, at the request of the local hotel businesses, to establish a tourism promotion district. Under this bill, the local hotels would have the authority to decide virtually every aspect of how such a district should be formed. Decisions such as the geography of the district, the manner by which the district is funded, how those funds should be re-deployed into the community, and a host of other matters will be up to the district itself. The needs of Columbus versus the needs of Cleveland or Canton are not the same, and this proposal recognizes this fact and allows each community to form a district as it sees fit.

It is important to note that Ohio would not be the first state to pass legislation allowing the creation of these districts. Tourism Promotion Districts are a proven funding tool used in more than 200 communities across 23 states. They create a self-funded revenue stream through a pass-through assessment on visitors—not on taxpayers—with strong local control and industry participation built into the process.

This bill allows local governments and tourism businesses to come together, develop a district plan, and determine whether a tourism promotion district makes sense for their

community. It requires buy-in from affected businesses and includes oversight provisions to ensure transparency and accountability.

For organizations like ours, simply having the ability to explore this tool when the time is right is valuable. HB 138 gives communities that flexibility, creating a mechanism that can benefit and continue to grow tourism locally here in Columbus and across the State of Ohio.

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and for your consideration. At this time, I'd be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

