



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 Gordon Taylor. I am the Chief Sales Officer at Destination Cleveland. We are the civic organization that markets Cleveland to consumers and convention planners outside of the region. In addition to promoting Cleveland as a leisure travel and meetings and conventions destination, our team helps to ensure the region's millions of visitors have memorable experiences. We're also the steward of the travel and tourism industry, working with hospitality partners and the community to keep them informed about upcoming major events and to help them prepare to offer visitors great experiences. In Cleveland, travel and tourism generates more than \$10 billion annually in economic impact – infusing out-of-region money into our cities, the county and the state.

In my role, my team and I work with more than 20 hotels in Cuyahoga County to attract group and convention business to our area. I've been with Destination Cleveland for five and a half years, and, previously, I worked for 22 years in the hotel industry with four large hotel brands.

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 tourism dollars. Specifically, this legislation would permit a local community, at the request of the local hotels, to establish a tourism promotion district. This bill would give local hotels the authority to decide virtually every aspect of how such a district should be formed. Decisions such as:

- the geography of the district
- how the district is funded,
- how those funds should be re-deployed into the community
- and a number of other matters will be up to the district itself – allowing hoteliers to decide where and when to invest the money generated.

The needs of each community are not the same, and this proposal recognizes this 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 local taxpayers—with strong area control and industry participation built into the process.



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

Let me share an example of how this funding tool would have helped Cleveland-area hotels last year. In August 2024, Cleveland proudly hosted the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Annual Meeting & Exhibition. This event is dubbed the “Super Bowl of Meetings” due to its outsized influence on future meetings & conventions business for the host city. The event brought the largest and longest-staying concentration of meeting decision makers that our city has ever seen.

ASAE estimates that 20% of decision-makers who attend the conference will book a meeting in the host city within five years – so you can imagine that destinations who land this prestigious event want to put their best foot forward.

By hosting ASAE, 16 downtown Cleveland hotels sold out over 4 days. Each hotel property went above and beyond to deliver an exceptional experience for ASAE attendees – including small “surprise and delight” items, live music and other entertainment. Some hotels literally rolled out a red carpet for attendees. Each hotel funded these extras out of their operating budgets because they knew the importance of impressing this group. Having a Tourism Promotion District in place when we hosted ASAE would have been incredibly beneficial for our hotels – allowing them to offer this type of 5-star treatment without impacting their bottom operating lines.

Since the event, we’ve seen a notable increase in large convention leads, and the ability to leverage potential Tourism Promotion District funds to help close on these opportunities would be a significant advantage moving forward. A Tourism Promotion District would help keep Cleveland competitive in the meetings and conventions space. And, it will ultimately have a positive impact on the community by continuing to increase the economic impact of travel and tourism in Northeast 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.