

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 Brian Ross, and I serve as the President and CEO of Experience Columbus. Experience Columbus is the sales, marketing and promotion organization for Columbus and Franklin County

I would like to thank Representatives Dovilla and Santucci for their introduction of this bill. Cities like Columbus compete with other cities across the country in an effort to secure the types of events that can showcase Ohio to the country and to the world.

I believe that we have done a tremendous job of showcasing Ohio's Capital City when we are given the opportunity to do so. Our hotels, convention facilities, restaurants and local economy have thrived through these efforts.

As this committee knows, the tourism dollar is one of the most valuable dollars that can be secured for a local economy. These are, frankly, dollars that are free to be spent wherever the market flows. There is nothing concrete about how these dollars flow into an economy.

Because of this reality, states have begun to develop a number of tools to enhance and strengthen the ability of local communities to secure tourism based activities, which is why I am here today.

HB 138 provides 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 and the needs of Toledo are not the same, and this proposal recognizes this fact and allows each community to form a district specific to its needs.

As I previously stated, other states have already recognized the value of these tools. Specifically, 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 taxpayers—with strong local 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 that flexibility, creating a mechanism that can benefit tourism locally 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.

