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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 Stephen Stewart, and I serve as the General Manager of Hyatt Regency Columbus. I have been employed with Hyatt Hotels for 42 years, which has offered me the experience to service 15 communities within the US, with the last 12 years being spent here in Columbus.

I am here today to speak as a strong proponent of HB 138, legislation which will permit the establishment of Tourism Promotion Districts in Ohio. As one of the anchor hotels to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, we know firsthand the importance of having a strong and competitive hotel community. While we believe that our convention facilities are among the finest in the country, we wholly recognize that we, as a community, cannot price ourselves out of the market by creating a cost structure in Ohio that puts us at a competitive disadvantage.

HB 138 is designed precisely with this balance in mind.

As you know, HB 138 is designed specifically to empower the local communities to establish – if they choose – a tourism promotion district that fits their specific needs and capabilities. This language expressly permits a community like mine to analyze and assess what may be a feasible and practical use of a tourism promotion district, without mandating any statewide application which may put us at a disadvantage with our peers. HB 138 gives those in this space the ability and authority to set up these districts as we feel is needed. Specifically, this legislation would permit a local community, at the request of the local hotel businesses, to establish a tourism promotion district.

As you know, 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.

I recognize that not every community in Ohio would choose to establish a tourism promotion district if this bill becomes law. Fortunately, this bill permits just that level of local autonomy. For organizations like ours, simply having the ability to explore this tool when the time is right is critical. 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.