



**Ohio Travel**  
ASSOCIATION

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Testimony by Melinda Huntley, Ohio Travel Association Executive Director,  
before the House Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee May 6, 2025

Chair Miller, Vice Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I also want to express my gratitude for your dedication to this important committee.

While my colleagues will discuss their specific industry sectors, I would like to highlight the travel economy as a collective and interconnected whole. The health of our travel economy depends on a rich tapestry of businesses, including attractions, restaurants, and lodging. Consider your last business trip or weekend getaway; you can probably name a variety of local businesses you encountered. This dependency on the parts to create a whole is precisely why our organizations work together for the good of Ohio.

Additionally, organizations such as convention and visitors bureaus and the state tourism office play a crucial role in promoting our great state. As State Tourism Director Sarah Wickham reported earlier to this committee, “Unlike other industries, tourism investments pay off quickly. The moment we bring a visitor to Ohio, they spend money in our communities—supporting local jobs and businesses immediately. This is why continued funding and support for tourism marketing is not just a good idea; it’s a smart economic strategy.”

Tourism is defined as traveling 50 miles or more one way for business or leisure. When we travel, we explore new places and spend money. These visitor expenditures create a chain reaction that helps local businesses, generates jobs, and supports communities.

### **Tourism is Big Business in Ohio**

In 2023, visitors spent \$43 billion during their travels. In turn, businesses in our tourism industry spent an additional \$13 billion on goods and services to accommodate these visitors. Our businesses bought manufactured items, accounting services, agricultural products, and much more. Combining these expenditures represents a \$56 billion contribution to the Ohio economy.

### **Tourism Creates Jobs and Makes Ohioans Employable**

Tourism is Ohio's 11th largest employment sector, supporting nearly 436,000 jobs. This is nearly 1 in 10 jobs in Ohio. More than half of these positions are full-time careers for general managers, chefs, marketing and HR professionals, IT experts, engineers, and others. These jobs aren't as visible as those you see when you walk into a hotel or restaurant. Still, they are there, behind the scenes, managing these businesses and creating the experiences.

Frontline and entry-level jobs offer valuable work experience and build the soft skills that are in demand across nearly every industry in Ohio. How many of you had a first job at a local business that served visitors? Frontline, entry-level positions are a gateway to gain experience, skills, confidence and training. Research shows having work experience in the travel economy leads to higher salaries, employability, career advancement, and academic achievement. The reason? One is that these jobs provide experience working with people.

### **Tourism Supports Ohio and Local Communities**

In 2023, visitor spending generated \$4.6 billion in state and local taxes, which eased the burden on residents by helping to fund infrastructure, education, health, and safety services.

When people visit a community or Ohio—and when they see a tourism ad—they are more likely to see Ohio as a good place to live, a good place to go to school, and a good place to start a business. Relocation decisions often begin with a visit as a leisure or business traveler. Ohio-based Longwoods International reports that 67% of individuals relocating to a new community had previously visited as leisure travelers. They “tried it on for size” and, liking it so much, decided to move there!

### **Destination Promotion Drives Results**

Advertising significantly influences travel decisions. In 2023, the TourismOhio campaign generated 703,000 trips and more than \$217 million in visitor spending—these trips and expenditures would not have occurred without TourismOhio’s advertising efforts. This led to close to \$16 million in incremental state and local taxes. In other words, for every \$1 invested in the TourismOhio campaign, \$66 in direct visitor spending and \$5 in state taxes were generated.

The same is true for the work of convention and visitors bureaus at the community level. Their advertising keeps the cycle we have discussed in motion.

Tourism is more than just an industry—it's an activity that generates value for nearly every industry in Ohio and our overarching economic development goals. But it starts with a visit, and visits start with awareness of all that Ohio has to offer. That requires continued investment and protection of promotional dollars. Dollars that directly produce a return in additional tax revenue and then some.

I am excited about the continued impact we can achieve together. We look forward to working with this committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share these insights.