



Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 138

February 17, 2026

Dirk Bengel, The Hancock Hotel, Findlay

Chairwoman Miller, Vice Chairman Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Substitute House Bill 138.

My name is Dirk Bengel, and I serve as General Manager of the Hancock Hotel in Findlay, Ohio. I appear before you today not on behalf of a national hotel chain, but as someone who operates a 99-room independent boutique property: a \$20 million investment in downtown Findlay, opened in 2018 on the campus of Marathon Petroleum Corporation.

The Hancock Hotel is proud to be AAA Four Diamond-rated, ranked the #1 hotel in Findlay and among the top-rated hotels in Ohio. We employ local residents, host weddings, meetings, and community events within our 9,000 square feet of event space and make every business decision from hiring to reinvestment locally and with our community in mind. We are not part of any corporate brand or flag.

**Concerns with Sub. HB 138**

**Imposed assessments without consent**

HB 138 would allow a majority of hotels in a proposed tourism promotion district, with votes weighted by assessments and beds, to impose a mandatory assessment on all hotels within that district. In Findlay, where only about 15 hotels operate, just two owners could initiate such a district. As an independent property with a higher average daily rate, our weighted vote may appear meaningful but, in practice, could be outweighed by others whose business models and markets differ greatly from ours.

**Inability to pass costs on to guests**

Our largest demand driver, Marathon Petroleum, operates under strict per diem travel policies. If the per diem is set at \$130, that's the maximum reimbursement allowable. Any added assessment would directly reduce our net rate; it is not a cost we can shift to the traveler. The same applies to weddings and special events, where couples compare total costs. Each additional dollar on a room rate makes our venue less competitive against non-hotel event spaces not subject to the assessment.

**Unfair burden compared to short-term rentals**

Findlay's lodging market now includes numerous Airbnb and VRBO properties serving the same customer base: visiting executives, university families, and event guests. Yet those short-term rentals would likely fall outside the statutory definition of "hotel" under R.C. 5739.01 and thus avoid the assessment. We would fund local tourism initiatives that also benefit them, while they contribute nothing. That is not equitable.

**Risk of external inclusion**

The bill permits tourism promotion district boundaries to cross jurisdictional lines with the consent of a convention and visitors bureau, but doesn't include consent of local elected authorities. Hancock County sits between Toledo and Lima; under this provision, a Toledo-based district could extend into our county. In that scenario, our assessments could support Toledo's marketing efforts, with no consent or oversight from the Hancock County Commissioners who are best positioned to represent and protect local interests.

**Lack of a meaningful opt-out**

Once formed, a district allows challenges or dissolutions only under narrow terms: limited windows, high signature thresholds and prohibitions when bonds exist. If revenue bonds are issued, participation effectively becomes permanent for the bond's duration, potentially decades. For a single-property operator without corporate backing, that creates unacceptable long-term risk.

The Hancock Hotel fully supports tourism promotion and already invests in it through existing lodging taxes, programs of Visit Findlay – the Hancock County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the events and guests we bring to our community.

What we oppose is a mandatory assessment imposed without consent, governed by boards we may not control, and dedicated to uses that may not align with our local market.

If this mechanism truly offers value, participation will come willingly. A voluntary model achieves the same goals without undermining local businesses. Alternatively, if the General Assembly believes Ohio tourism needs additional financing, we urge you to strengthen and modernize the existing lodging tax structure, not create a parallel system that erodes long-standing taxpayer protections.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to reject Substitute House Bill 138.

Thank you for your time and consideration.