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House Community Revitalization Committee
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Testimony on HB 218

Chairman Click; Vice-Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Community Revitalization Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **proponent** testimony on HB 218 allows retail liquor permit holders to offer a discount on dealcoholized beverages when purchased along with wine under specified circumstances.

As a matter of introduction and background, my name is Kerry Metzger. I am a retired dentist, and I practiced dentistry for 26 years. I had the privilege to serve in the Ohio House of Representatives from 1995 through 2002. I also served as a Tuscarawas County Board of Commissioner serving in that position for 18 years.

I am currently serving as the chairperson of the Tuscarawas County's Empower Tusc Coalition. Our coalition is youth focused with a vision of "empowering youth to live healthy, drug-free lives." Our mission is "to prevent youth substance use and misuse and promote mental health wellness by implementing effective prevention strategies."

The committee might wonder why a youth-oriented organization, such as Empower Tusc, is interested in such a public policy bill that does not directly affect those under Ohio's drinking age? Because supporting discounts on dealcoholized beverages **can be a subtle but powerful way** for a youth-focused organization, like the Empower Tusc Coalition, to reinforce its commitment to healthy, substance-free lifestyles.

Why would this approach matter? Let me provide you with some reasons why:

1) Promoting Responsible Social Choices:

By emphasizing dealcoholized options through discounts, you underscore that enjoying social experiences does not have to mean consuming alcohol. This helps shift cultural norms away from the idea that alcohol is the only way to have fun. When healthier, alcohol-free alternatives are both accessible and appealing, it becomes easier for youth to see that their social lives do not have to be intertwined with substance use.

2) Aligning with the Mission of Prevention:

The coalition's mission is to prevent youth substance use and promote mental health wellness. By backing initiatives that make dealcoholized beverages more attractive through discounts, the coalition actively **creates an environment where harmful substances are not glamorized.** Instead, the focus is on well-being and smart choices, which is a tangible manifestation of prevention strategies.

3) Encouraging Healthy Habits Early:

Youth are in a formative stage where habits and preferences are just developing. When healthier alternatives are made more readily available and economically attractive, it can normalize alcohol-free choices. Over time, this normalization can help reduce curiosity about alcohol and lower risks of experimenting with alcohol or other substances, reinforcing a lifestyle that supports mental wellness.

4) Building an Inclusive Social Culture:

Discounts on dealcoholized beverages also send a message of inclusivity. Not everyone feels comfortable or able to consume alcohol—even among young people. By promoting these options, the coalition recognizes a broader spectrum of youth experiences and creates environments where all young people can participate fully without the pressure to conform to potentially harmful behaviors.

5) Economic Incentives as Preventative Tools:

Economic incentives can be a subtle yet effective layer in a comprehensive prevention strategy. If healthier options are also economical, they become a natural choice. This kind of proactive approach—using discounts to shift buying behavior—can be seen as an investment in long-term public health, not just an immediate cost-saving measure.

Supporting discounts on dealcoholized beverages embodies a commitment to creating healthier social environments, shifting cultural expectations, and providing real-world tools for youth to make choices. It is not just about offering a cheaper product; it is about laying the groundwork for long-term wellness by normalizing substance-free social interactions while actively reducing the appeal—and hence the risk—of alcohol consumption.

In conclusion, the Empower Tusc Coalition, supports the concepts found in HB 218 which **will support youth prevention efforts across the state of Ohio.**