

Proponent Testimony on HB 161

Presented to the Ohio House of Representatives Development Committee

Beth Kotwis Carmichael, Trumbull County Tourism, April 30, 2025

Chair Hoops, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today in **support of House Bill 161**. My name is Beth Carmichael, and I am the CEO of **Trumbull County Tourism** in Northeast Ohio.

Visitor Spending Doesn't Just Happen – It's Earned

When visitors come to Trumbull County—whether it's for a fishing tournament at Mosquito Lake, agri-tourism experiences in our Amish communities and wineries, a round of golf at one of our amazing courses, or a weekend retreat at The Grand Resort—they help power a critical part of our local economy. But those trips don't happen by accident. They happen because of **dedicated marketing efforts funded almost entirely by lodging taxes**.

New Lodging Model, Same Responsibility

Yet whether a visitor stays at a national-brand hotel, a boutique resort, or a short-term rental, the experience is the same: they are guests in our community. Yet not all lodging providers are treated equally in terms of tax responsibility. That's what HB 161 seeks to correct.

Short-term rentals engage in the same commercial activity as hotels; they rent overnight accommodation to visitors. It only makes sense that STR owners collect and remit lodging and sales taxes, just like any traditional lodging business.

Updating the Rules to Match the Marketplace

HB 161 **brings consistency to Ohio's lodging market**. It doesn't raise taxes, and it doesn't change how funds are distributed. It simply ensures that **all lodging providers are treated equally under the law**.

Small Investment, Big Return

While lodging taxes do primarily support tourism promotion, and we're proud of that work, their impact extends far beyond visitor attraction. **Tourism-driven visitor spending produces critical tax revenues** that support economic growth, infrastructure investment, and the basic services every Ohio community relies on. In Trumbull County alone, that equals **over \$121 million in tax generation**.

This matters to me and our Board of Directors because **tourism is one of the few industries where a small investment, like our \$500,000 annual budget, produces an outsized return**. Trumbull County's \$500,000 investment generated over \$80 million in incremental visitor spending, returning approximately \$285 for every \$1 spent. Whether a district has a large tourism base or a small one like ours, tourism is serious business that strengthens communities statewide.

By passing HB 161, Ohio will **level the playing field**, support local economies, and grow the visitor economy that benefits every resident across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge your support of HB 161 and I'm happy to answer any questions.