

**Testimony of Dr. Matthew P. vandenBerg, President of Ohio Wesleyan University
In Support of House Bill 291 – Creation of the Ohio International Trade Commission
Presented to the Ohio House of Representatives Development Committee**

June 2025

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and esteemed members of the House Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 291. My name is Dr. Matthew vandenBerg, and I have the privilege of serving as President of Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio.

For more than 180 years, Ohio Wesleyan has educated leaders in business, government, and service. Today, we are a nationally ranked liberal arts university with a growing reputation for entrepreneurship, innovation, and global engagement. We are committed to producing graduates who are not only workforce-ready but world-ready—and to serving as a catalyst for economic opportunity across our state.

We believe House Bill 291 is a timely and strategic investment in Ohio's future. As our state looks to expand exports, attract global investment, and equip workers with 21st-century skills, this legislation creates the infrastructure to turn ambition into action.

By establishing a dedicated International Trade Commission, you will:

- Open new trade opportunities for Ohio businesses.
- Help small and mid-sized enterprises access global markets.
- Strengthen workforce development with internationally relevant skills.
- Foster collaboration among business, government, and higher education.

At Ohio Wesleyan, we are ready to serve as a collaborative partner in advancing these goals.

We already offer robust academic programs in accounting, finance, economics, international business, and management economics. But beyond academics, Ohio Wesleyan is building one of the nation's most distinctive undergraduate ecosystems for founders and entrepreneurial leaders—an approach deeply aligned with Ohio's global economic vision.

We're not just preparing students to work in companies—we're preparing them to start them.

That commitment is evident in:

- The Delaware Entrepreneurial Center at Ohio Wesleyan University – a first-of-its-kind business accelerator at a small liberal arts college and a first-of-its-kind partnership between a university, a city, and a county.
- The U.S. Entrepreneurship Competition – Ohio's most lucrative business plan competition and the second largest in the nation. In its first year alone, it awarded nearly \$500,000 in investment capital to help six companies launch.
- Kickstart Ohio – a new three-day statewide entrepreneurship conference, hosted at Ohio Wesleyan this fall, with five distinct program tracks to equip founders wherever they are in their journey.
- The Woltemade Center for Economics, Business and Entrepreneurship – a long-standing hub for business learning and student research since 1985.

These initiatives—and others in development—demonstrate Ohio Wesleyan’s commitment to preparing entrepreneurial leaders and fueling economic growth across sectors and borders.

Establishing an International Trade Commission will amplify those efforts. It will provide the coordination, visibility, and infrastructure needed to help Ohio thrive in a fiercely competitive global economy.

House Bill 291 reflects a bold, forward-looking vision for Ohio. It sends a clear message that we are serious about global leadership, strategic about partnerships, and committed to building a future of broad-based prosperity.

As president of Ohio Wesleyan University, I am proud to support this legislation. We stand ready to serve as a strong and active partner in the success of the Ohio International Trade Commission.

Respectfully,

Dr. Matthew P. vandenBerg
President
Ohio Wesleyan University