

## **Testimony of Steve Flaherty**

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In Support of House Bill 291 – Creation of the Ohio International Trade Commission

Ohio House of Representatives Development Committee

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### **Chairman Hoops, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and Members of the House Development Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 291, which proposes the creation of the Ohio International Trade Commission.

My name is Steve Flaherty. I'm the Founder and CEO of necoTECH, an Ohio-based company working at the forefront of sustainable infrastructure. Our team is commercializing a 100% recycled asphalt technology designed to bring circularity and cost efficiency to the construction and maintenance of our nation's roads. Additionally, I also serve as the Entrepreneur in Residence at the Delaware Entrepreneurial Center, a joint initiative between Delaware County, the City of Delaware, and Ohio Wesleyan University, where I work directly with entrepreneurs across the region to help them start, refine, and scale their businesses.

From both perspectives, leading a startup working to scale nationally and mentoring others doing the same, I can say with certainty: Ohio needs a stronger platform to help our entrepreneurs and small businesses engage with global markets.

At necoTECH, we've been fortunate to grow through strategic collaborations and public-private innovation support, including several AFWERX contracts through the U.S. Air Force. These programs have helped us advance our R&D, but our core identity remains rooted in commercial infrastructure, therefore, our goal is to bring our products to market at scale, here in Ohio and beyond.

As we move toward broader adoption, one of the biggest opportunities, and challenges, we face is expanding into international markets. The demand is there, but accessing it is not easy. For companies like ours, entering new countries requires more than just ambition or innovation. It requires partnerships, cultural understanding, regulatory insight, and credibility, all of which are difficult to build when you're focused on product development, operations, and fundraising.

And we're not alone. Across the state, small and mid-sized companies, particularly in manufacturing, high-tech, logistics, and software, are building globally relevant solutions. But most don't have the internal capacity or diplomatic relationships to navigate foreign trade and cross-border growth.

That's where House Bill 291 comes in.

By establishing the Ohio International Trade Commission, this bill gives us the structure and institutional support to compete more effectively on the global stage. The Commission would provide Ohio businesses with access to trade opportunities, investment pathways, and joint ventures that are typically out of reach for smaller firms.

It also fosters collaboration between private enterprise, higher education, and government—ensuring that our approach to international engagement isn't fragmented, but aligned.

At the Delaware Entrepreneurial Center, I work with a wide spectrum of founders, some just starting out, others already generating revenue and hiring staff. They're building in sectors like AI, advanced materials, mobility, sustainable goods, and digital commerce. Many of these entrepreneurs have the ambition and the capability to expand internationally, but they don't have the roadmap. HB 291 helps build that roadmap.

It's not just about trade missions or high-level diplomacy. It's about infrastructure, giving Ohio companies the tools, relationships, and visibility they need to grow responsibly and globally.

Just as importantly, the bill sends a message. It tells the world that Ohio is not content to play small. We're serious about leading innovation, expanding our global footprint, and building economic resilience that extends across regions and industries.

We already have the pieces:

- A world-class workforce with deep roots in engineering, logistics, and manufacturing
- A growing base of early-stage companies solving real problems
- Academic institutions producing globally capable talent
- A business culture driven by grit, pragmatism, and progress

Now we need to connect those pieces into something greater.

House Bill 291 is a strategic, timely, and necessary step to do just that. I strongly support its passage and encourage the committee to advance this bill. It's not just a good policy, it's a smart investment in the kind of future we want to build here in Ohio.

Thank you for your time, and for your leadership on this important legislation. I welcome any questions.