



Proponent Testimony | HB 291
Creating the Ohio International Trade Commission
Ohio House of Representatives | Development Committee
June 11, 2025 | Columbus, OH

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

Statement of Interest.

Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of our eight Jewish federations and their 150 community, cultural, social, and human services agencies on the front lines helping Ohioans of every faith – and of none – every day. We submit this testimony on their behalf as well.

We were just here a few weeks ago on a bill with some similar aims, HB 188, and we're very grateful today to be here in support of HB 291. Reps. Mathews and Santucci have done some amazing work here and we'd like to say thank you.

What Does this Legislation Do?

I'm not going to repeat everything I said a few weeks ago, but we should keep in mind that Ohio is at an inflection point economically. The state, through the work of the General Assembly and the Governor, as well as JobsOhio and the regional affiliates, have produced some incredible economic development wins for Ohio. Of course, Ohio's first major international business win was under Governor Rhodes when he brought Honda here.

As Ohio's manufacturing economy gets ready for the innovation economy, Japan still plays a critical role as one of Ohio's largest Foreign Direct Investment partners. Ireland, of course is a gateway to the European Union, and, as I mentioned when I was here last, Israel is an innovation powerhouse with potential to impact nearly every one of Ohio's major industries, from agriculture to defensetech and from advanced manufacturing to space flight.

Ohio will need both that access and that innovation to grow its economic leadership. Ohio is still not on the list for many businesses or foreign direct investment; and, there are still areas of the state where workforce options and opportunities do not reach enough people.

That's where legislation like this plays such an important role. By focusing on the international sector, by building relationships, and by finding ways to collaborate with international partners, Ohio will both be on the map and expand its own map.

And that is why we would ask for one change to this bill. Ensure there is funding for staff that will do the day-to-day work and make sure that there is funding for Ohio's businesses, research institutions, medical centers, and universities to use as their portion of international partnerships. That's what the Israel Trade & Innovation Partnership in HB 188 would do, as we discussed. And we urge that that same funding to make Ohio more competitive today, and in the decades to come, be a part of this bill.

Connecting Ohio and International Universities, Medical Centers, and Research Hubs for Life-changing R&D

Innovation begins with great ideas and the research and development behind them to create something new. Helping to fund specific R&D projects to innovate new products, new solutions, and new procedures needs to be a key focus here.

Finding clients for solutions by startups to test, not “proof of concept” but proof of market

Proving that your new solution works is just the first step. So many startups and innovators can create something new, but for some reason, they can't find a market for it. The staff must focus their collaboration efforts on finding those first critical clients to help startups prove their market.

Again, we view these strategic partnerships as either bilateral or multilateral and believe both would help Ohio companies going overseas to new markets as well.

Bringing workers to Ohio as well as training Ohioans to FutureProof their employability

Finally, helping create more taxpaying roles is vital, and the Commission staff ought to look to attract startup employees working internationally to Ohio to help them get boots on the ground here and establish business roots here. As well, the Commission should work to help upskill those who can work in the innovation space and fill the roles these startups and innovative companies are creating.

We also believe it is imperative to have at least one staff member making these connections and pitching Ohio on a daily basis. That will be key to taking the lessons learned from Ohio's past success here and replicating it statewide.

Why Now?

Now is the time to push hard for these innovation partnerships. Japan is the entry point to Asia, and now, with a renewed US defense commitment there, along with Ohio's long relationship, a great base in the region. Ireland is a tech hub in its own right and an anchor of the European continent. As we already said when we were here last, looking at Israel's partnerships with the Abraham Accords specifically, we can see they are focused in areas Ohio is showing growth and leadership.

A Vision for Ohio's Future

Imagine an Ohio where small and large enterprises are the best in class. Imagine every region of Ohio has growing startups and research and development projects hiring.

For an industrial focused state like Ohio, our way of growing such businesses has to be different than what you see on the coasts.

As a leading Ohio based venture capitalist recently told us, “From our perspective, investing at the intersection of technology and traditional industry, one of the most powerful ways Ohio can attract leading Israeli startups is by actively leveraging our state's established corporations as early validation partners and pilot sites. Demonstrating clear market demand and providing a pathway for Israeli tech to solve real problems for Ohio companies can be a more significant



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draw than general incentives alone,” effectively integrating Ohio's corporate strengths into its attraction strategy. That’s true for Europe – which lacks a well established venture capital industry and doesn’t have a “Silicon Valley” of its own. It’s true for much of Asia as well.

Next Steps

We hope we can move this bill quickly, including, if necessary, based on the testimony you’ll hear, to amend it slightly. We ask that you continue this committee process, and as soon as possible, report the bill out favorably. There’s a lot of jobs depending on it.

I’m happy to take any questions. Thank you again for your time.

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