

**The Port of Cleveland**  
**Testimony in Opposition to Sub. H.B. 147**  
House Development Committee  
February 25, 2026

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Brownlee, and members of the House Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Sub. HB 147 today on behalf of the Port of Cleveland.

My name is Rhonda Winslow, and I am the Vice President of Development and Finance for the Port of Cleveland.

The Port of Cleveland is one of the principal economic development engines in Northeast Ohio.

Each year, the Port's maritime operations:

- Move approximately 13 million tons of cargo
- Support more than 20,000 direct, indirect, and induced jobs
- Generate roughly \$7 billion in total economic impact
- Produce hundreds of millions of dollars in state and local tax revenue

Beyond maritime commerce, the Port plays a critical financing role. Through capital lease transactions and other development tools, we help structure projects that catalyze private investment across industrial, manufacturing, commercial, and mixed-use sectors.

Over the past decade, port-supported financing in our region has helped leverage billions of dollars in private development — projects that otherwise may not have moved forward.

These decisions are made locally, in public, by a board appointed by local elected officials and accountable to the communities we serve.

That local accountability is central to our success.

We appreciate the intent to encourage investment. However, Sub. H.B. 147 changes the structure of Ohio's port authority model — one that has worked effectively for decades — in ways that raise serious policy concerns.

Under the substitute bill, if a port authority does not execute an agreement within 30 days — or its refusal is deemed “unreasonable” — the developer may take the proposal to the Ohio Tax Credit Authority.

If statutory conditions are satisfied, the Authority must grant the exemption.

That is a significant shift.

Port authorities do not simply verify whether a project exceeds a dollar threshold. We evaluate:

- Whether the public benefit justifies the sales tax exemption
- The fiscal impact on local jurisdictions
- Infrastructure demands and incentives received from the local municipality
- Community alignment with the location and use of the proposed project
- Overall economic return to the community

Those are inherently local judgments.

Sub. H.B. 147 replaces that locally accountable review with a largely mandatory state-level certification process. Those risks turning what is currently a negotiated public incentive into a statutory entitlement.

The Port Authority sales tax exemption applies broadly to construction materials incorporated into the project.

At a time when the General Assembly is engaged in broader tax policy discussions — including property tax reform and fiscal sustainability — expanding automatic sales tax exemptions deserves careful scrutiny.

The Port of Cleveland strongly supports economic growth. Our record demonstrates that.

But Ohio's port authority model works because it balances:

- State-authorized tools
- Local governance
- Public accountability
- Case-by-case economic analysis

Sub. H.B. 147 disrupts that balance by:

- Creating a state override of local decisions
- Establishing an arbitrary \$25 million threshold favoring large projects
- Expanding exemption authority without proportional guardrails

For a region like Northeast Ohio — where strategic, community-sensitive development is essential — preserving local discretion is not theoretical. It is practical economic policy. It also threatens to upend a system that has served Ohio well for decades. The Port of Cleveland has supported 150 projects totaling \$6.1 billion of investment in Ohio since 1993.

HB 147 is a solution in search of a problem.

We respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider this approach and maintain the locally accountable framework that has generated measurable economic impact for our state.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.