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Chair Ray, Vice Chair Fischer, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 16. I am honored to stand before you today in support of this legislation.

Last General Assembly I introduced House Bill 668, which would have completely prohibited Homeowner Associations from restricting the display of political yard signs. As a democracy, political beliefs, whether I agree with them or not, should not be censored. It is through that belief and that understanding of our democracy, that I worked to create this outright prohibition as outlined in last year's House Bill 668.

However, there are individuals who do not want their neighbors displaying signs all over their lawns. Additionally, it is not the intent of Homeowner Associations to silence political beliefs, but rather their concerns lie in the appearance of the neighborhood. Therefore, through dialogue with various groups, my joint sponsor and I, have developed a bill that remedies these concerns.

House Bill 16 outlines a few restrictions to account for the issues presented in the last General Assembly. Unlike in House Bill 668, this bill sets up substantial guardrails. If House Bill 16 were to pass, Homeowner Associations would not be able to restrict the display of at least one political yard sign 30 days prior to an election. Additionally, Homeowner Associations would not be able to restrict the size of political yard signs beyond the outlined limit of twelve by eighteen inches.

Also, last year some individuals were concerned that this restriction would allow the display of hate speech. With this bill, we ensured that would not be an issue, because all of the content displayed on these signs would have to adhere to state and federal law, those laws are ORC Section 2927.12 and 18 U.S.C. 249. Section 2927.12 pertains to the crimes of menacing and telecommunications harassment. This section states that anyone found guilty of ethnic intimidation in relation to these crimes, would face additional penalties. 18 U.S.C. 249 restricts 'Hate Crimes', which are offenses involving actual or perceived race, color, religion, or national origin. The political yard signs as discussed in this bill, must abide by these laws, and therefore, any hate speech displayed on a political yard sign would not be allowed.

Chair Ray, Vice Chair Fischer, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the committee, my joint sponsor and I believe that this bill accounts for both the problems of the homeowners and the Homeowner Associations, while also guaranteeing that we protect the free speech of political beliefs, as well as limiting the potential abuse of yard signs.