

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the committee:

My name is Jim Higdon, and I'm co-founder of Cornbread Hemp, a Kentucky-based manufacturer of hemp wellness products and hemp beverages. As a small business, we serve thousands of direct-to-consumer adult customers in the Buckeye State. I'm here to support HB198 and to express our gratitude Representatives Tex Fischer, Ty Mathews, and their many co-sponsors who see hemp product regulation as the correct path for Ohio instead of prohibition or confining hemp products to cannabis dispensaries. We applaud Ohio's efforts to keep hemp products accessible for all adult consumers.

This bill is so good that I hesitate to nitpick it. However, HB198 is just one tweak away from being perfect, and it's important for our customers that we share this one concern. We respectfully request the authors consider amending HB198 to reverse the proposed ban on direct-to-consumer sales for hemp beverages.

Across the nation, we are in the midst of an effort by multiple competitive industries that seek to take over the hemp industry through state-level legislation, and a key part of that strategy appears to be targeting direct-to-consumer sales.

However, we have succeeded by educating legislators on the importance of DTC sales for our customers. In Kentucky, we faced the prospect of a full prohibition of hemp beverages backed by powerful interests — but by educating lawmakers, we preserved the right to sell hemp beverages direct-to-consumer despite this stiff opposition. Indiana also appears poised to pass a hemp bill that preserves direct-to-consumer sales of all hemp products, including beverages.

This is why we are concerned about the proposed ban on direct-to-consumer sales of hemp beverages in HB 198 – two neighboring states have come to a different conclusion. Additionally, it is my understanding that Ohio allows direct-to-consumer sales of wine from out-of-state wineries, with certain reasonable restrictions. We respectfully request that DTC for hemp beverages be allowed with the same restrictions as wine sales to make HB 198 an even better bill.

Cornbread Hemp and other responsible hemp beverage manufacturers follow strict age-gating standards to ensure we ship DTC orders only to adults over 21. Please make this good bill better by allowing DTC hemp beverage sales.

We support HB198, and we will encourage our thousands of Ohio customers to support this bill as it moves through the process. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.