



Chairman Thomas, Ranking Member Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and all members of the House Judiciary Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Mo Dayem, and I am an Ohio resident and business owner here to voice my support for House Bill 198. A bit of background on me, I obtained an associate's degree in Law Enforcement from Cuyahoga Community College, then obtained a bachelor's degree in Justice Administration from Tiffin University, and interned in the federal court system, federal Probation & Pretrial Services & also the United States Marshals Service. Afterwards I took a job with the State of Ohio within the Department of Rehab and Corrections. There I received extensive training on many topics, including drugs and their impact on individuals.

I worked for the state for approximately three years. I worked nearly 80-hour weeks throughout, saving as much as I could to invest in a business that I always dreamt of having. Once I had enough money, and with the help of a loan, I was able to open my first smoke shop location. I took an abandoned building in Ohio's 7th largest city that was located on one of Ohio's busiest intersections and invested nearly half a million dollars into it, making it one of the nicest-looking buildings in town.

Today I own 6 smoke shops, a wholesale company, and several commercial and residential real estate properties. I have also given employment opportunities to over 500 individuals over the years and paid millions in taxes.

As a responsible business owner, I have prioritized giving back to my community. My company has donated almost 500 gun safety locks. Including donating 250 one year to a state lawmaker to pass out at a county fair. We donate annually to a local peanut butter drive (All Faith Pantry). We also allow all local charities to advertise on our large digital screen on our property for free.

We understand that Ohio lawmakers see the hemp industry as currently unregulated, and I understand why the topic is being debated. I assure you that the industry is in support of reasonable regulations, like those contained in House Bill 198. We want the responsible businesses to continue to operate and ensure there are not bad actors, and unsafe product, in the market.

Provisions in the bill that we support include prohibiting sales to those under the age of 21. The industry agrees hemp products are for adult use. For my businesses, a customer must be 21 to even enter my

stores. I train my employees to check IDs using a widely recognized “We Card” program. I ensure my employees understand these best practices. Ensuring age restrictions are instituted statewide is something this body should enact. If a retailer sells to someone underage, there should be penalties, including revoking a license to sell the products.

HB 198 also would ensure products on the market are tested to ensure confidence of what is in the product. Testing should be performed by accredited laboratories. The industry also supports labeling requirements and restrictions. Some products that have garnered media attention are packaged like known children’s candy brands. This should be prohibited, and the industry agrees they should be off the market.

The hemp industry was legalized in 2019 in part at the urging on Ohio farmers who wanted to engage in the business. A ban would be counterproductive to that 2019 bill and could undermine investments that have been made in the cultivation and research of hemp. In order for the growing of hemp to benefit farmers, they need a market in which to sell their harvests.

I hope this committee will recognize the hemp industry supports regulations to ensure consumer safety and confidence. We want responsible businesses to thrive and keep a strong open market. I hope this committee will support this approach. Thank you for your time and consideration and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.