



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 198 BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2025 – 11:00 AM

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AFFAIRS & PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Good morning, Chairman Thomas, Vice Chairman Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 198, legislation to provide a regulatory scheme for the sale of hemp-based products, on behalf of the members of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants. We appreciate the efforts of Representatives Fischer and Ty Mathews to create a pathway forward for the safe and legal sale of hemp-based products in our members' stores.

Some of our member companies have responsibly sold a range of legal, non-consumable hemp products such as lotions, creams, soaps, and hair products for six years. We are currently unaware of any members selling consumables with a high concentration of THC, marketed in packaging to entice children to purchase them, and we do not support the sale and marketing of such products. Our members are very hesitant to enter the consumables market without a specific regulatory framework in place.

Therefore, we strongly support the regulatory framework created by House Bill 198 that would permit them to sell adult-only consumable products that contain an accepted level of THC sometime in the future, as the market for such products develops. Our members' POS systems already verify age before purchase, employees are trained to prevent underage sales, and they display signage that indicates age verification is required. Thus, they are well-positioned to comply with any Ohio regulations on approved adult-use products as permitted by House Bill 198.

Many consumers have shared their preference for consuming hemp-derived products containing low amounts of THC, such as gummies and beverages, over alcohol. These hemp-derived products provide for relaxation, better quality of sleep, and no "hangover" effects the next day. As consumers' preferences change, our members want the opportunity to provide them with legal options.

We hope the Committee will agree that the free-market regulatory approach provided for in House Bill 198 is better for Ohio businesses and consumers than relegating these non-intoxicating hemp-based products to marijuana dispensaries. Please remember that Ohio is currently losing sales because people are buying these products online. This practice will continue until the legislature makes it easier for them to purchase safe, legal products in non-dispensary settings. Our members provide the type of environment where people would prefer to go to make these purchases, and House Bill 198 would allow them to do so.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our support for House Bill 198. I am happy to attempt to answer any questions you may have.