

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking member Isaacsohn and all members of the House Judiciary Committee, I stand before you today not as a politician or lobbyist, but as a testament to the power of opportunity and the enduring spirit of the American Dream. I'm here to urge you to support House Bill 198, a bill that is vital to the future of countless small businesses and hard-working Ohioans.

My story begins humbly, on a family farm. Growing up, life was a constant struggle, a cycle of dawn-to-dusk labor. We worked tirelessly, but the fruits of our efforts often felt inadequate, barely enough to keep us afloat. The American Dream, a promise of prosperity and security, felt distant, a shimmering mirage on the horizon. Then, one day, everything changed. I walked into a smoke shop right here on North High Street, a place that seemed worlds away from the fields I knew so well.

To my surprise, I was offered a job. That single opportunity, a chance to earn a living in a different way, transformed my life trajectory. It was a lifeline, a bridge to a better future. That job allowed me to support my family, to ease the burdens my parents had carried for so long. I was able to improve their living conditions, to provide them with a level of comfort and security they had only dreamt of. It was the American Dream unfolding before my very eyes.

Today, I stand before you as the owner of that very same smoke shop. I've poured my heart and soul into this business, building it from the ground up. And now, I'm in a position to offer that same life-changing opportunity to others, to provide jobs and a sense of purpose to fellow Ohioans who are seeking their own piece of the American Dream. House Bill 198 is crucial to ensuring that small businesses like mine can continue to thrive.

Our customers deserve the freedom to choose the products they consume. With sensible regulations, we can ensure a safe and responsible industry, one that benefits both consumers and the state's economy. I know some may be concerned about the potential impact of this industry. But I urge you to listen to the voices of your constituents. Ohio voters do not want to see hemp vanish from our stores, nor do they want it relegated solely to dispensaries. They want a diverse market with options and the freedom to make informed choices.

Furthermore, I must address the ongoing attempts by the marijuana industry to cast a negative light on current hemp retailers. This is nothing more than a thinly veiled effort to monopolize the market, to restrict competition and concentrate power in the hands of a few. Such a move would fly in the face of everything America stands for: opportunity, competition, and the freedom to pursue one's dreams. I implore you, members of the Ohio State Legislature, to support House Bill 198. Support small businesses, support the American Dream, and support the freedom of Ohioans to make their own choices. Let us work together to create a thriving and responsible industry that benefits all

Ohioans, not just a select few. Thank you for your time and consideration and I will try my best to answer any questions you may have.