CENTRAL OHIO
DEFENSE GROUP

House Bill 292
Proponent Testimony
House Veterans and Military Development Committee
February 4, 2026

Steve Tugend
Chair, Central Ohio Defense Group

Chair Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe, and members of the House Veterans and Military Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Resolution 292, sponsored by Representatives Ty Mathews and Nick Santucci.

My name is Steve Tugend. I chair the Central Ohio Defense Group and am an attorney at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter. In my capacity as the Chair of the Defense Group, I offer this testimony as a proponent of House Bill 292, which establishes the Ohio Defense Commission and the Ohio Defense Fund.

Central Ohio Defense Group Mission

The Central Ohio Defense Group is an organization comprised of government, nonprofit and corporate members that is concerned about preserving and growing defense-related jobs in the Central Ohio Region, including jobs in the area of aerospace. The members of the group include One Columbus, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, the City of Whitehall, the City of Columbus, the Columbus Partnership, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, the City of Canal Winchester, Battelle, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, The Ohio State University, Franklin County, the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, and Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter.

Together, we advocate for policies that strengthen Ohio's role in our nation's defense supply chain, including aerospace, logistics, and national defense to ensure that Ohio remains a trusted partner in advancing America's security and innovation priorities.

Why HB 292 Matters

House Bill 292 represents one of the most important structural advancements for Ohio's defense ecosystem in decades. The legislation establishes the Ohio Defense Commission, a formal entity to coordinate among state, federal, military, and industry partners, and

creates the Ohio Defense Fund, which can invest directly in defense-related infrastructure, innovation, and workforce development.

This bill recognizes that Ohio's defense sector is critical to both our state's economy and our national security. The Commission will strengthen coordination between business, the military, and academia, and position Ohio to better compete for Department of Defense missions and funding.

Among its priorities, the Commission will:

- Foster collaboration among state agencies, defense installations, research institutions, and private industry;
- Support small defense businesses and prime contractors pursuing federal opportunities;
- Invest in new facilities and infrastructure to attract and retain key missions;
- Encourage innovation through a Defense Business Incubator; and
- Promote advanced technology research, including in emerging fields such as counter-UAV systems, cybersecurity, and aerospace propulsion.

Strategic Benefits

The Ohio Defense Commission and Ohio Defense Fund will serve as a unified framework for advancing the state's defense economy and ensuring readiness for the next generation of national security needs. The benefits of HB 292 include:

- **Strengthened Coordination**: Bringing together public and private stakeholders to align Ohio's defense strategy with national defense priorities.
- **Economic Development**: Leveraging defense investments to create and retain high-skill, high-wage jobs in aerospace, logistics, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Innovation and Research**: Building partnerships between Ohio universities, research organizations, and defense contractors to accelerate development of critical technologies.
- **Mission Retention and Growth**: Ensuring Ohio's existing installations — from Rickenbacker to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and beyond — are competitive in future Department of Defense basing and mission decisions.

For Ohio's communities, this means more jobs, stronger supply chains, and a deeper connection to our national defense mission.

CENTRAL OHIO
DEFENSE GROUP

Conclusion

On behalf of the Central Ohio Defense Group, I respectfully urge the committee to support House Bill 292. This legislation will provide the structure, resources, and coordination needed to ensure Ohio continues to lead in supporting our nation's defense readiness.

HB 292 is not just about maintaining what we have — it's about building a stronger, more connected, and more competitive defense economy for Ohio's future.

Chair Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe, and members of the committee — thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Ohio's veterans, service members, and defense community.