



Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for affording me this opportunity to testify in support of Ohio's EV charging provisions within the operating budget bill.

My name is Stephen Hightower II and I serve as the Chief Operating Officer of Hightowers Petroleum.

Like many in our industry I represent a small family-owned business, we employ over 50 people and we invest and give back to our hometown, Middletown, OH.

When my grandfather started our company in 1956 it was a janitorial business, which was a good business back then. As years have gone by, however, we have continued to adapt, change, and grow to meet the shifting times and needs of our customers.

Today, Hightowers Petroleum Company is one of the largest independent fuel distributors in the United States, delivering a load of fuel every 7 minutes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are also proud members of the Ohio Energy and Convenience Association (OECA), which represents all segments of the fuel and convenience supply chain.

Once again, we have sensed the winds of change and have jumped into the burgeoning electric vehicle market, with Hightower EV. At this stage it's an investment that we are confident will pay off if the playing field is open and free market principles prevail.

Going electric is a challenging undertaking which requires substantial change at the consumer-level, which I support. But for it to be successful, it will require participation of the most reliable and efficient distribution network – retail fuel stations.

Retailers are already reimagining the convenience store of the future where you have a place to recharge your mind and body while your electric vehicle powers up. We embrace new technology and we are eager to meet the needs of our customers, but as small business owners we must have certainty that Ohio's EV charging market will be based on a level playing field.

EV charging stations are a considerable investment, and private businesses will not risk their capital if there is a chance their investments could be subject to unfair competition from Ohio's electric distribution utilities.

The legislation before you represents a reasonable compromise that will appropriately balance the roles of the private sector and electric utilities in the growing market for EV charging services. Utilities will obviously play a crucial role in this process and fuel retailers are ready to work with them in a collaborative manner to ensure Ohio builds the most robust and efficient EV infrastructure possible.

We are pleased to support this legislation, which mirrors Sen Reineke's SB 106 which was introduced earlier this year. As the world rapidly changes, we must remain true to our free market principals. Small and family-owned businesses and the thousands of families that work with us are counting on it.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.