Committees:
Medicaid Committee (Chair)
Health Committee
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Community Revitalization Committee

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Representative Jennifer Gross
The Ohio House of Representatives

Good afternoon Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 134.

HB 134 offers a practical solution to Ohio's outdated Cottage Foods and home bakery registration laws that prevent home-based food producers from earning a living and growing their business.

Under existing regulations, producers must use a commercial kitchen, which can cost between $50,000 and $100,000—a significant financial barrier. HB 134 provides an alternative, opening new avenues for selling homemade food.

In establishing a MEHKO [Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation] registration, Ohioans would be legally able to prepare cottage foods in their home kitchens, such as meat and dairy products, which would otherwise be prohibited without a food processing establishment license.

Administered by the Department of Agriculture, the registration process includes a fee of up to $75 for initial registration and $25 for renewals. To qualify, home kitchens must pass an annual inspection, a process already in place for home bakery registrations. The bill also establishes straightforward sanitation standards to ensure the safe handling and production of perishable foods.

HB 134 expands economic freedom by creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic growth. It complements the existing home bakery registration, by allowing people to sell a greater variety of food from their homes.

These common-sense reforms have created jobs and economic growth without compromising food safety in states with similar laws. Today, 12 states, including AZ, AK, CA, IA, MA, MT, NE, ND, OK, TN, UT, and WY, allow the sale of perishable food in home-based businesses. To date, there are no confirmed cases of foodborne illness in these states linked to the sale of perishable food products in home kitchens.

Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations bring additional healthy food options to families and gives business opportunities to entrepreneurs. The MEHKO Registration reduces barriers to entry for small food businesses, creates more flexibility in the Ohio Cottage Food framework, supports entrepreneurship, and supports local economies.

Thank you for hearing our testimony on HB 134. We are happy to answer any questions at this time.