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Committees
Government Oversight
(Ranking Member)
Energy
Community
Revitalization
Public Safety

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.

House Bill 134 was passed in November with overwhelming bipartisan support in the Ohio House, reflecting a shared commitment to expanding economic opportunity for Ohio's home-based entrepreneurs while maintaining food safety standards. That strong vote demonstrates the broad consensus behind this commonsense proposal and the confidence this body can have in advancing it further.

In Ohio, home-based producers can currently sell food either under the state's cottage food exemption for shelf-stable foods or under the state's home bakery registration.

Under Ohio's cottage food exemption, home-based producers of shelf-stable food are exempt from licensing and inspection and may sell their food directly to consumers through grocery stores, to restaurants, at farmers' markets, at farm markets, and at festivals or celebrations organized by political subdivisions of the state that do not last more than seven days. Under the state's home bakery registration, home-based producers can sell only baked goods—perishable and shelf-stable—directly to consumers and at retail.

Perishable goods are only arbitrarily allowed to be sold under the home bakery registration, but it does not allow any other type of perishable food, even though the food is similarly safe to consume. For example, cheesecake can be sold in Ohio, but not other foods requiring refrigeration, like mac and cheese.

HB 134 proposes a solution by creating another option for Ohioans—the Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MEHKO) registration. This option provides Ohio's home food producers with increased income potential by expanding the variety of foods that can be sold, while still operating within a clear regulatory framework. Importantly, this model has been implemented successfully in other states,

demonstrating that expanded opportunity and public health safeguards can coexist effectively.

By implementing this MEHKO registration, we can increase food resiliency by providing new sources of food within communities—especially in food deserts or during disruptions to national supply chains. It can also increase access to locally made products and culturally diverse foods for all populations, while empowering entrepreneurs to grow their businesses responsibly.

I would now like to turn it over to my joint sponsor, Representative Gross, to share additional details of the bill.