Proponent Testimony on H.B. 134

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Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

Ohio House Bill 134 aims to Authorize home kitchen registration for sale of certain foods.

Good afternoon, Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee.

My name is Lair Marin-Marcum. I serve as the Ohio Libre Initiative State Strategic Director. The Libre Initiative is a sister organization to Americans for Prosperity and Concerned Veterans for America.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify as an Interested Party on H.B. 134**.** The Libre Initiative in Ohio is dedicated to creating a stronger and more efficient Ohio for all its communities. We aim to foster self-sufficiency and to thrive through principles of free enterprise.

Overview HB 134 modernizes Ohio's cottage foods laws by creating a Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MEHKO) registration administered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The bill allows qualifying home kitchens to prepare and sell a broader range of foods, including certain perishable items that currently require a food processing establishment license while maintaining public-health protections.

The problem under the current law is that home-based producers are limited to nonperishable items or must use a licensed commercial kitchen to sell perishable foods. Commercial kitchen access or build-out commonly costs $50,000–$100,000, a challenging barrier for many aspiring entrepreneurs, especially in rural communities and among women, immigrants, and low to moderate-income households.

What will HB 134 do:

- It will Establish a (MEHKO) registration administered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- Allows qualifying home kitchens to prepare and sell additional perishable foods currently prohibited under the cottage food framework.
- Sets an initial registration fee (up to $75) and a renewal fee ($25).
- Requires an annual inspection (consistent with current home bakery practice) and establishes clear sanitation and training standards for safe production and handling of perishable foods.

The benefits of the bill:

- Economic opportunity: Lowers barriers to entry and enables microbusiness formation and growth.
- Local economies: Keeps food production and sales local, create jobs and strengthen community food systems.
- Build on Consumer Options: Expands access to diverse, locally produced foods.

- Public-health safeguards: Coupled expanded access with registration, inspection, sanitation standards, and training. States with comparable laws (AZ, AK, CA, IA, MA, MT, NE, ND, OK, TN, UT, WY) have expanded entrepreneurship without confirmed foodborne illness traced to perishable home-kitchen sales.

This matters in Ohio given the affordability issue all Ohioans are experiencing in one form or another. People are struggling to find another source of income. Many Ohioans, particularly homemakers and residents of smaller communities, need feasible pathways to start and grow small businesses. HB 134 provides practical, responsible tools to support entrepreneurship while preserving consumer safety.

The important guardrails in the bill with inspections and training are very important, but what's even more important is that this will give start-ups, especially in our rural parts of Ohio, a way to provide for themselves and their families. This expansion of the state's cottage food law will enable people to have a profitable small business that in addition broaden food options in local communities.

Conclusion HB 134 is a balanced, common-sense update to Ohio's cottage foods framework. It lowers barriers to entry for small food businesses, supports local economic growth, and maintains reasonable public-health protections. I respectfully urge the committee to support HB 134 and am available for any questions.