Written Testimony in Support of Ohio HB134

Hearing: Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

March 3, 2026

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

On behalf of End Chronic Disease, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of H.B. 134.

End Chronic Disease is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing science-based policies that can help prevent, treat, and reverse the chronic diseases that are wreaking havoc on families in Ohio and across the nation. Collectively, chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, cancer, and chronic respiratory conditions, among others, are the leading cause of death in Ohio and in the United States.[1] In 2022, six of the ten leading causes of death in Ohio were attributed to chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and stroke.[2]

In Ohio, approximately 13.2% of adults report having been told they have diabetes by a health professional, compared with the national average of roughly 11.5%.[3] Obesity, a well-established risk factor for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and stroke, affects a substantial portion of the adult population.[4] Chronic kidney disease and hypertension are also increasing concerns, with significant implications for long-term health and health care costs.[5] These conditions create a substantial public health burden and increase the risk of complications that can be prevented or delayed through improved diet and healthier food environments.

Scientific research confirms that poor diet – especially poor nutritional intake – is one of the most significant root causes of these chronic conditions. Having limited access to affordable, nutrient-dense foods contributes to higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases, while increased access to healthier food options is associated with better diet quality and reduced risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.[6] Expanding opportunities for Ohioans to access healthier food from diverse sources is therefore an important part of a comprehensive approach to prevention and health promotion.

H.B. 134 modernizes Ohio law to authorize microenterprise home kitchen operations, allowing individuals to prepare and sell certain homemade food items under a registration and inspection framework. By creating a pathway for small-scale producers to bring food directly to consumers, the bill expands access to fresh, locally prepared foods while ensuring food safety standards through registration, labeling, inspection, and training requirements.

From a chronic disease prevention perspective, this bill does several important things:

First, it increases community-level access to healthier food options. When families have a wider array of sources for fresh, minimally processed foods, they are more likely to choose nutrient-dense options that support improved diet quality and reduce chronic disease risk.[6]

Second, the bill supports local food entrepreneurs and food equity. Chronic disease burdens are often greater in lower-income and underserved communities where traditional sources of healthy foods may be limited. Authorization of microenterprise home kitchen operations can strengthen local food ecosystems, bring culturally relevant foods to communities, and help address gaps in access to nutritious foods.[6]

Third, H.B. 134 preserves public health protections. The bill's requirements for registration, inspection authority, labeling, and food safety training help ensure consumer protection while broadening access.

Chronic diseases are largely influenced by modifiable lifestyle and environmental factors, particularly nutrition and access to healthy foods. Policies that increase access to healthier food options represent evidence-based strategies for chronic disease prevention, improved metabolic health, and long-term cost containment.

For these reasons, End Chronic Disease respectfully urges the Committee to support H.B. 134. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Kelly McKenna

CEO, End Chronic Disease

ENDNOTES

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention*: Chronic diseases remain leading causes of death and disability in the U.S.; poor diet is a major risk factor. https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/data/index.htm
2. Ohio Department of Health, *Geographic Disparities in Chronic Disease, Ohio, 2023*: Six of the ten leading causes of death in Ohio were attributed to chronic diseases (heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, etc.). https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/669e8054-644e-4909-a04a-183923d4c76d/Geographic+Disparities+in+Chronic+Disease.pdf
3. America's Health Rankings, *Diabetes in Ohio* (2023 BRFSS data): 13.2% of Ohio adults report having diabetes. https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/state/OH
4. *Adult Obesity in Ohio*: Ohio continues to have high adult obesity prevalence, which is linked to increased risk of chronic conditions including diabetes and heart disease. https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/obesity/OH
5. America's Health Rankings, *Chronic Kidney Disease Increase*: Chronic kidney disease prevalence among Ohio adults has increased in recent years. https://www.americashealthrankings.org/publications/reports/2024-annual-report/state-summaries-ohio

6. Ohioans Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition: Limited access to healthy foods is linked with poorer diet quality; access to nutritious foods helps protect against non-communicable diseases like diabetes and heart disease. https://www.ohioafp.org/wfmu-article/ohioans-access-to-healthy-food-and-nutrition/