

**Chris Singerling**  
**Ottawa County Improvement Corporation**  
**Senate Finance Committee**  
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Dear Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on FY2026-27 State Operating Budget and specifically amendment SC 0197.

My name is Chris Singerling, and I serve as Executive Director of the Ottawa County Improvement Corporation, the lead economic and workforce development organization serving Ottawa County. Our mission is to support sustainable growth that benefits our vibrant communities, local businesses, residents, and workforce.

Amendment SC 0197 presents serious concerns that would significantly impact that mission. By allowing counties to redirect lodging tax revenues, this amendment could weaken the very systems that have driven meaningful economic progress in Ottawa County and our region for the past two decades.

The tourism industry is a vital part of our local economy. It not only draws millions of visitors to our region annually – it also fuels our small businesses and provides essential job opportunities for our county’s largest private industry sector – alone representing an estimated 20% of our total labor force. The revenue generated from this enhances quality of life and infrastructure needs, making our communities more attractive to talent and investment.

The partnership between Ottawa and Erie Counties through Shores & Islands Ohio has been a model of regional collaboration – one lauded by the industry nationally and encouraged by both state and local governments. This coordinated effort has effectively promoted our destination and supported tourism-centric businesses creating long-term economic value. As an example, lodging taxes alone in Ottawa County have more than tripled during the 19 years of this partnership – and our 14 municipalities who also have their own individual lodging tax directly supporting that communities general fund. I am confident in saying that these numbers would not be anywhere near where they are if it were not for the efforts of our regional destination marketing organization. Simply put, undermining this structure would decimate nearly 20 years of momentum and progress.

We urge this Committee to reconsider amendment SC 0197 and the impacts it will have on our local economy. The conversation about the future of tourism investment is both timely and essential – but should occur at the local level in a constructive and open forum. To use a local euphemism, let’s not drain the whole lake for a few walleye. Again, I would like to thank the entire Committee for your time and be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.