

June 4, 2025

The Honorable Jerry Cirino  
Chair, Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
1 Capitol Square, Rm. 127  
Columbus, OH 43215



**RE: Written Proponent Testimony on HB 96 – Restoring Protect OHIO Funding**

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 96, specifically in support of an amendment to restore funding for The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine to the House-approved level of \$15 million. This funding is essential to launching the Protect One Health In Ohio (Protect OHIO) initiative, which aims to strengthen Ohio's veterinary infrastructure and prepare for future disease threats.

Cooper Farms is a fourth-generation, family-owned producer of turkeys, hogs, and chicken egg layers. Over the past 87 years, the company that my parents founded has grown into one of the largest producers of turkey, pork, and egg products in North America. This success has only been achievable through our ability to raise healthy animals, which relies heavily on strong, pro-agriculture public policies and a robust animal agriculture infrastructure. With operations throughout Northwest and Western Ohio, where agriculture is the backbone of our economy, we are just one of many producers working each day to ensure our country has a safe, reliable food supply. We deeply value our collaboration with state leaders and institutions like The Ohio State University as we work to safeguard animal health. Bottom line: Protecting the health and well-being of our animals means protecting the livelihoods of our 2,500 team members, the 400 family farmers we partner with to raise our animals, and our nation's food supply.

Unfortunately, we and other members of Ohio's poultry industry know all too well the impacts that disease can have on our operations. The recent Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreaks dealt a heavy blow to Cooper Farms and other turkey and egg producers throughout the state. Collectively, we were forced to depopulate millions of animals, which directly impacted food production. As Cooper Farms and other producers throughout the state continue to work to overcome the devastating impacts HPAI has had on our companies, it is imperative that the state makes proactive investments in research and disease mitigation. Without it, we could face even bigger challenges in the future.

Our company relies heavily on the veterinarians on our staff who help protect our flocks and herds from disease. With their guidance, we employ strict biosecurity measures and conduct regular disease surveillance to ensure our animals stay healthy. Unfortunately, Ohio is facing a severe veterinary shortage, which puts all of this at risk. Nearly half of the \$15 million allocation requested would support the recruitment and graduation of more veterinarians, which is essential to supporting Ohio's robust animal agriculture industry.

The proposed funding would also establish a much-needed Emerging Animal Disease Center, which would give Ohio the ability to detect, respond to, and contain future outbreaks before they escalate. A modest investment today could prevent multi-million-dollar losses tomorrow.

Unfortunately, our industry is already paying the price for underinvestment in animal disease readiness. Restoring this funding to the House-approved \$15 million is not just about supporting a veterinary college, it's about protecting jobs, rural livelihoods, and Ohio's agricultural competitiveness for the long term.

I urge your support for the amendment. Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to Ohio's agricultural community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gary Cooper  
Chief Operating Officer, Cooper Farms

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