



**SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE  
INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 56**

**Sarah Biehl, Policy Director**

**February 18, 2025**

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear, and members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 56. My name is Sarah Biehl, and I am the Policy Director at the Ohio Mayors Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of mayors in Ohio's largest cities. Our communities are deeply invested in ensuring that any changes to Ohio's recreational marijuana program protect the ability of local governments to work in tandem with the state to ensure the health and safety of their communities.

As you know, in 2023 Ohioans voted overwhelmingly to enshrine adult-use recreational marijuana access into state law, enacting a statute that provided for state level regulation akin to Ohio's liquor licensing process. Ohio's recreational marijuana program is just the latest in a long line of statewide policy issues that fall heavily on local governments to monitor and enforce. While respecting the voters' intent that the program be regulated statewide, it is also another example of an issue that would benefit greatly from allowing more local control to ensure that individuals who purchase and use recreational marijuana are following state laws that protect consumers, children, and Ohio communities.

The 31 cities that make up our bipartisan coalition collectively spend over \$2 billion annually on public safety. It is a long-established reality that law enforcement in Ohio is primarily a local endeavor, and ensuring that our communities are safe and our first responders are well equipped, well trained, and competitively compensated are our mayors' highest priorities. With that in mind, we offer two suggestions for ensuring that the changes you are making to Ohio's existing recreational marijuana statutes facilitate local communities' ability to promote, enforce, and preserve public safety.

- 1. Maintain/expand the Host Community Fund.**
- 2. Allow for complementary local tobacco and marijuana retail licensing and fees on a permissive basis.**

**Maintain and Expand the Host Community Fund**

Local communities both large and small have the option to permit recreational marijuana businesses to be located within their jurisdictions, and hundreds of communities across Ohio have elected to either allow or prohibit businesses. We, of course, want you to maintain that level of local control. Many communities that have elected to allow recreational marijuana businesses to locate and sell products

within their borders, however, did so in reliance on sharing in the tax revenue directed by the voter-approved statute that allowed for 36% of state tax revenue to be directed to a “Host Community Fund.” To eliminate that revenue sharing fund with local communities that have acted in reliance on the existence of that fund would be fundamentally unfair. It would also ignore the very real needs of the extensive investments local taxpayers have made in their local police forces, particularly in light of their enhanced monitoring, training, and enforcement responsibilities with the creation of Ohio’s recreational marijuana program.

We strongly urge you to maintain the Host Community Fund at a *minimum* of 36% of total state tax revenue from the recreational marijuana program.

**Create an option in state law to allow local tobacco and marijuana retail licensing and fees on a permissive basis**

Last year, the General Assembly inadvertently preempted local governments from enforcing local tobacco retail licenses (“TRLs”) as part of a larger effort to preempt local tobacco regulation. We believe this was a mistake, and we offer the suggestion that this mistake can be remedied and addressed in concert with allowing for some **permissive** additional local regulatory control on both tobacco and recreational marijuana.

We do not propose to rewrite state statutes to dismantle state-level regulation of Ohio’s recreational marijuana program. We propose adding an optional and limited provision that would allow local governments to choose to enact local retail licenses for businesses that sell tobacco or recreational marijuana, with the authority to impose a modest local fee to **fund public safety enforcement of recreational marijuana-related impaired driving and both marijuana and tobacco age restrictions locally.**

We believe that this proposal strikes a balance between ensuring statewide uniformity of the rules around sale, possession, and use of recreational marijuana (and tobacco), while allowing for some additional flexibility to ensure local enforcement and public safety resources remain available.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and for your ongoing collaboration with our cities and our local law enforcement agencies. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.