



# ERIE COUNTY TREASURER

## CALEB STIDHAM, TREASURER

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May 6, 2025 Testimony -- Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Caleb Stidham. I serve as Erie County Treasurer. I am here today in support of Amendment SC0197, which offers certain counties more flexibility in their use of lodging tax dollars. I won't repeat the explanation provided by Erie County Commissioner Matt Old, but will seek to add additional context from my role as county treasurer.

As a county treasurer whose county went through a revaluation in 2024, I have seen firsthand the impact of Ohio's broken property tax system. Residents are being asked to pay more and more for the same or lesser services from local taxing entities. And I have seen the impact of these unfair tax increases when residents are not given a say in the decision.

In Erie County, we are blessed to have fiscally conservative leadership that focuses on government's core functions. We have saved resources for capital investments and a rainy day. And because of this style of leadership, Erie County was the only county in the state to suspend its entire portion of inside millage tax collection in calendar year 2025. This lowered tax bills for property owners by more than \$7.5 million this year.

It may seem counterintuitive for a county in good fiscal shape to ask for access to more resources. I understand those who make that argument. However, our tax cut will not remain permanent without structural change in our county. How can county leaders look residents in the eye and restore tax collection when millions of lodging tax dollars are being spent on one narrow purpose?

That is why Erie County was the first county in Ohio to create a government efficiency commission. The "Blue Ribbon Commission", as it's been named by county commissioners, is a group of seven local experts with a diverse set of experiences in the public and private sectors who are studying how to make our local governments more efficient. Our cities, villages, townships, school districts, and county leaders have worked with the commission, which is preparing a list of recommendations that will be released later this year. The goal of the commission is to reduce the tax burden on residents while maintaining quality local services.

Based partially on feedback from the commission, I am here today asking lawmakers to consider a commonsense change to the lodging tax. We are advocating that decision-making be partially restored to elected leaders who are accountable to voters. Local taxpayers should not be asked to pay more for costs created by thousands, even millions, of visitors.

I value the mission of Ohio's convention and visitors' bureaus. It's important that communities like Erie County have high-functioning bureaus that attract visitors and put heads in beds. However, this amendment still guarantees a substantial budget for our bureaus while allowing elected leaders to consider the bigger picture. Allowing counties to invest in safety services, infrastructure, and economic development will also attract visitors. And it will protect those who call our counties home.

Chair Manchester, I appreciate the committee's time and will be happy to take any questions.