



# ERIE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

2900 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky, Ohio 44870

Phone: 419-627-7672

Fax 419-627-7692

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:

My name is Matt Old, and I serve as an Erie County Commissioner. I am asking this committee to support the inclusion of Amendment SC0197 into House Bill 96. This amendment offers necessary flexibility to several counties in Ohio which are smaller than 100,000 in population but have a lodging tax collection of more than \$500,000 annually.

Ohio currently allows for boards of county commissioners to levy a three percent lodging tax that must be distributed to a convention and visitors' bureau and spent to promote tourism in that county. For smaller counties in Ohio, this collection represents a modest source of funds. However, there are currently 11 counties in the state that have a population of less than 100,000 but a lodging tax collection of more than \$500,000 annually. According to a CCAO analysis, those are Ashtabula, Athens, Belmont, Clinton, Erie, Guernsey, Hancock, Hocking, Holmes, Ottawa, and Tuscarawas Counties. Erie County has the highest lodging tax collection among this group of counties at over \$3 million annually. We are fortunate to be among the state's largest tourist destinations, with Cedar Point, Kalahari, Kelleys Island, and much more attracting millions of visitors each year. However, this blessing comes with its share of challenges. Last year, more than 30% of the individuals who were booked at our county jail resided outside of Erie County. And our taxpayers are asked to spend millions to fund large infrastructure maintenance and improvements because of tourists driving on our roads and utilizing our water and sewer infrastructure.

The amendment referenced previously would allow up to two-thirds of the lodging tax collection to be spent to support three vital services that are impacted by tourism: 1) public safety services, 2) economic development, and 3) public infrastructure. It places the decision-making authority in the hands of elected leaders rather than an unelected body. It preserves at least one-third of a large lodging tax collection for the convention and visitors' bureau. And again, please note that this change would only impact counties that are smaller in size but with significant lodging tax revenue (currently 11 in the state).

I strongly believe this change is necessary for communities like mine. It is fundamentally unfair that our residents are asked to shoulder so much of the burden for services that are often utilized by tourists. It doesn't make sense to restrict the use of such a meaningful sum of funds to a narrow purpose with no accountability. The current system deprives residents and their elected leaders of the ability make decisions about what is best for their community.

This amendment seeks to balance the intent to give these funds a larger impact with the need for functioning convention and visitors' bureaus throughout these counties. We understand the impact that effective visitors' bureaus can have in supplementing the substantial marketing efforts of private attractions.

Chair Manchester, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I am happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.