

Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Opponent testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 96

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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee — thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 96, the state operating budget.

Cleveland appreciates the continued support of the Ohio General Assembly for key funding initiatives that directly impact our city's ability to provide essential services, support economic development, and maintain public safety. We are encouraged by the inclusion of funding for brownfields and demolition, the Welcome Home Ohio program, the expansion of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit, and continued investments in public safety. This support is critical in helping Cleveland and other communities move forward.

However, while these provisions are important, Cleveland urges the Ohio Senate to consider additional measures to better support Ohio's cities, particularly in funding local public safety. Public safety is the largest and most critical expense for the City of Cleveland, representing a substantial portion of our general fund budget. Our residents, businesses, and visitors depend on well-resourced police, fire, and emergency medical services.

Public Safety Investment

Toward that end, we urge the Ohio Senate to carefully consider the proposals put forward by both the Ohio Mayors Alliance and the Ohio Municipal League. While the current version of the budget increases the Local Government Fund (LGF) to 1.75% of the General Revenue Fund, this allocation remains significantly lower than historic levels. The Ohio Municipal League advocates for further increasing the LGF, which is essential for supporting public safety investments in cities like Cleveland. Concurrently, the Ohio Mayors Alliance proposes the creation of a dedicated Public Safety Fund that would provide targeted financial support to municipalities and townships with full-time police and fire departments, allocated proportionally based on each community's public safety payroll. This dedicated fund would ensure a sustainable source of support for communities where public safety is a critical and substantial budgetary obligation. We respectfully ask the Ohio Senate to give thoughtful consideration to both of these important proposals.

Cannabis Host Community Fund

Cleveland also urges the General Assembly to maintain what is effectively a 3.6% tax on sales that is distributed to host communities. This funding is vital for cities that have made the decision to host dispensaries, helping them manage the increased demand on public safety and other local services resulting from legalization. Furthermore, we oppose a time limit for this tax. Because the marijuana-caused increased demand for services will not decrease after a certain number of years, there should be no time limit on the revenues that municipalities receive.

Recreational Trails and Local Control

Cleveland strongly opposes any provisions that would restrict the ability of local governments to use eminent domain for the creation of recreational trails. Recreational trails are a critical public amenity that enhances quality of life, connects neighborhoods, promotes healthy living, and provides safe, non-motorized transportation options. Local elected officials, who are most familiar with their communities' needs, should retain the authority to determine when and where to establish these trails. A blanket statewide restriction undermines local decision-making and prevents communities from fully utilizing this important tool for public benefit. The language currently in the state operating budget is particularly dangerous because it could limit the ability of local governments to design roads, streets, and bridges in a way that safely separates pedestrians and bicyclists from motoring traffic.

Lead Abatement and Public Health

Cleveland also urges the Senate to reinstate the Lead Safe Home Fund Program and restore full funding for lead abatement programs. Lead poisoning remains a persistent public health threat, particularly in older housing stock common throughout Cleveland and other Ohio cities. The House-passed version of the budget reduces lead abatement funding to \$250,000 per fiscal year – a drastic cut that is insufficient to address the widespread need for lead hazard control. We strongly recommend restoring funding to \$7 million per year, which would enable cities like Cleveland to better protect children and families from lead exposure.

Stadium Relocation

Cleveland strongly opposes the \$600 million bond package for a new domed stadium in Brook Park. This proposal was advanced without local consensus, conflicts with long-term regional planning, and threatens the economic vitality of downtown Cleveland, which hosts three professional sports venues bringing millions of visitors and supporting local businesses. Relocating the stadium would undermine decades of public investment, slow the city's lakefront redevelopment efforts, and cause an estimated \$30 million annual loss to the local economy. The City of Cleveland believes that a solution to maintain the Browns at the lakefront, leveraging existing investments, is the best path forward.

Chair Manchester and members of the committee — Cleveland remains committed to partnering with the state to ensure safe, vibrant, and prosperous communities. By supporting critical dollars for public safety, maintaining the current marijuana tax revenue allocation, protecting local control over recreational trails, restoring funding for lead abatement, and ensuring that major economic investments like stadium projects reflect local consensus, the General Assembly can help ensure that Cleveland and other Ohio cities continue to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration.