

**The Township of Put-In-Bay
Township Trustee Matt Miller
House Bill 96 | May 14, 2025**

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 interested party testimony on House Bill 96.

The Township of Put-In-Bay supports two key provisions in this legislation. The first would grant our residents the authority to raise the resort tax through a ballot initiative. This amendment is critical to addressing our unique public safety expenses as a small island community with exuberant tourism rates. Put-In-Bay is home to 500 full-time residents. However, each summer we welcome over 750,000 visitors. This increase in tourism during limited times of the year strains our limited public safety resources. Our police department is primarily funded by local taxes and the existing resort tax, which is no longer sufficient to meet the growing demand for law enforcement and emergency services. Granting our residents the ability to determine the appropriate level of taxation ensures local control and accountability, while enabling us to protect our community and the many visitors who contribute to our Northern Ohio's economy.

The second provision addresses Put-In-Bay Township's increasing burden in providing emergency services to its surrounding islands. The island that has absorbed most of these additional calls and expenses is Middle Bass Island. Thirty percent of Middle Bass Island and 95% of North Bass Island was purchased in 2001 by the State and has since been staffed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. However, in recent years, ODNR has withdrawn its staff and emergency personnel services. As a result, our township now bears the responsibility and cost of providing first responder services on this state-owned land without reimbursement. The proposed amendment seeks fair compensation for these services, in return for our continued staffing of these islands.

These provisions will allow Put-In-Bay to maintain the safety and security necessary for our thriving tourist economy. Overall, this amendment will support responsible fiscal management and reduce the long-term strain on our local taxpayers. Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and committee members, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I welcome any questions you may have.