



City Councilwoman Merisa Bowers  
200 S. Hamilton Rd., Gahanna, OH 43230

To: Senate Local Government Committee  
From: Councilwoman Merisa Bowers, At-large  
Re: Opponent Testimony - Senate Bill 104  
Date: March 12, 2025

Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Local Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to Senate Bill 104. My name is Merisa Khourey Bowers, a proud daughter of Ohio. I was raised in Canton, attended the University of Cincinnati for undergrad, and earned my law degree from Case Western Reserve University. I have called Gahanna home since 2012 and it is my distinct honor and privilege to serve our community in my second term on Gahanna City Council as Council President. I am also a proud wife of a veteran first responder with 25 years of service, and the mother of a second grader.

Gahanna is a charter city of 36,000 residents located to the east of Columbus. Named one of the Best Hometowns by Ohio Magazine, Gahanna boasts 770 acres of parkland, the high performing Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, and a 74% owner occupancy rate in our homes. Though we celebrate the annual Creekside Blues and Jazz Festival, Gahanna is not particularly a tourist destination, and there are currently three hotels within city limits with many more within a mile or two of our municipal borders.

As an advocate for local control and home rule, I oppose Senate Bill 104. Preempting local governments on regulating short term accommodations, SB 104 undermines our ability to respond to constituents and serve our communities' best interests. In Gahanna, we have seen first hand the **disruptive impact of short-term accommodations in residential neighborhoods**.

Ms. Annette Brood, a resident of Gahanna for 17 years, shared with our Council last year how a former family home in her neighborhood was converted into an Airbnb, resulting in a pattern of disruption on a small cul-de-sac: groups of transient workers used the house instead of staying at an area hotel, parking half a dozen vehicles on and around the property and causing damage to the adjacent property owner's yard. The **non-resident owner did not meet our usual standard of stewardship**: when I observed the property one morning, trash and debris littered the yard and the owners had done nothing to mitigate the bad-will growing with the neighbors.

In two separate incidents at short-term accommodation properties, Gahanna Police Officers responded to neighbor complaints of noise, intoxicated people, and disorderly conduct, and



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encountered **private security patting down guests for firearms**. Such incidents, along with other complaints about transient "crash pads," increase the risk of harm to our constituents and officers.

Beyond these disruptions, there's a larger economic impact at play caused by the upsurge in unregulated short term rentals: **the loss of housing stock for working families**. Every home that is converted into a short term rental is one less property available for families looking to buy or rent a home in Gahanna. This reduces the availability of housing stock, which in turn, increases the cost of living and the cost of homes. When institutional investors with limited stake in our community buy properties for short-term accommodations, they drive up housing prices, making it harder for working families, young professionals, and seniors to afford to live in Gahanna. **This commoditization of housing is skewing the fair market:** those who can generate profit have a different calculus than a family deciding whether they can afford a mortgage.<sup>1</sup> This effectively shifts housing from long-term stability to short-term profit.

Senate Bill 104 would exacerbate this issue by **forcing what are effectively unregulated hotels in every neighborhood**, which is unpopular among voters, unsafe, and unstable.

I want to make it clear that I am not opposed to vacation homes and guests, nor am I opposed to certain flexibility for homeowners to create a supplemental revenue source by subletting a room. This style of accommodation can provide tourists and transient workers an alternative to a hotel room. Tourist destinations like Sandusky, Kelley's Island, and the Hocking Hills area need to have the flexibility to address transient accommodations differently than a community like Gahanna. I speak on behalf of residents of Gahanna when I state that local governments must have the ability to ensure transient accommodations are managed responsibly and do not harm the stability, character, and safety of our residential neighborhoods.

Our neighbors and our neighborhoods are the backbone of Gahanna's identity. **This bill strips us of our ability to preserve and protect our residents and their neighborhoods, and undermines long-term housing options.** I urge you to reject Senate Bill 104 and allow local governments to protect the interests of our communities.

Thank you.

/s/ Merisa K. Bowers

Gahanna, OH 43230

[merisa.bowers@gahanna.gov](mailto:merisa.bowers@gahanna.gov)

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<sup>1</sup> See Proponent Testimony of Mark Remeis, March 5, 2025.