

SB104

Senate Local Government Committee

March 12, 2025

Chair O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Ohio Senate Local Government Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide opponent testimony regarding SB104, related to Short-Term Rentals.

My name is Chris Nichols, and I am in my 24th year of serving my community as a Township Trustee in Canton Township, located in Stark County. I sit on the Ohio Township Association Board of Directors. I also serve as the budget director for the Stark County Commissioners and I'm the current Board Chair of our county's CVB.

While I am here to provide opponent testimony, I will say that there are some provisions of the proposed legislation that I strongly support, primarily the registration requirement and the requirement in the bill to collect local lodging taxes through the booking platforms. The lodging tax requirement will ensure local governments are receiving all tax revenues they are legally due, as well as providing tax parity and fairness with the local hoteliers, with whom most Short-Term Rentals compete.

Currently, without a registration requirement, it is incumbent for the counties and other political subdivisions to identify each individual Short-Term Rental property, find the contact information for the owner and attempt to bring them into compliance, with civil action being our only recourse. For example, in Stark County, there are just under 200 Short-Term Rentals, but only about 15, or less than 10% remitted the County's Lodging Tax in 2024.

Our township's main concerns relate to removing almost all local ability to regulate Short-Term Rentals and limiting our opportunities to properly address the issues and concerns of our residents, related to safety and neighborhood integrity. These issues may be unique and certainly vary political subdivision to political subdivision, just within our own county, let alone across the state.

While Short-Term Rentals are found in all 88 counties across our state, there are some places where the density and impact of Short-Term Rentals is significantly higher and where the issues may be different than in other areas of Ohio. Due to our proximity to the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the Hall of Fame Village Development, especially the Village's youth sports field complex, Canton Township is one of those places.

In Canton Township, we have approximately 22 Short-Term Rentals and almost all of them can be found in a 4-square block area near the Hall of Fame Village complex. In addition, one company owns 8 of these Short-Term Rentals, effectively operating a 25+ room hotel in the middle of a quiet, mature residential neighborhood.

In this neighborhood, the average lot size is only about 0.15 acres, with most homes having very short driveways and minimal yard space. The sudden growth of Short-Term Rentals and the density in such a small area has begun to change the character of one of our most stable neighborhoods.

Some of the issues we have experienced, and concerns raised by our residents include:

- On-street parking with campers or motorhomes, impeding the safe flow of traffic and emergency vehicles.
- Multiple vehicles parked on the streets, impacting our resident's parking.
- Parties, which are even in violation of the standards of the booking platforms.
- For parents, not knowing who and with what legal backgrounds are staying in the house next to them from week to week, while their children are out playing in the yard.

Another issue we have experienced was a Short-Term Rental, with a basement bedroom. This bedroom had glass block windows and no emergency egress, in violation of the Residential Building Code of Ohio (section 310.1). Issues like this can impact both the safety of the guests staying in the Short-Term Rental as well as the safety of our first responders in the event of a fire and just another reason why some level of local regulation is imperative.

While I understand the desire to protect private property rights, at the end of the day, most of these properties were not bought to serve as the owner's primary residence. These properties were purchased for the sole purpose of being operated as a business within a residential area.

By purchasing a property anywhere where zoning regulations are in place, a property owner acknowledges that they cannot just do anything they want with their property. Just as someone cannot buy a residential property and open a muffler shop, the property owner accepts that there are limitations in place for the property's use, limitations put into place for the good of the whole community.

In conclusion, good legislation, relating to Short-Term Rentals, will balance the need and desire to provide some level of consistency in basic regulations statewide, with the acknowledgment that the circumstances and needs of Ohio's 88 counties, 253 cities, 673 villages and 1,308 townships, relating to Short-Term Rentals, are diverse and varied. Good legislation will still allow for some level of local regulation and inspection to address those needs, to protect our residents and our neighborhoods as well as the guests staying in our local Short-Term Rentals.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.