

Chair Sandra O'Brien and Members of the Senate Local Government Committee

Proponent Testimony

May 25, 2025

Dear Chair O'Brien and Members of the Senate Local Government Committee,

My name is Johnny Knight IV. I am a property and business owner operating short-term rental homes in Portage Lakes near Akron, Ohio.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 104, which I believe is essential to protecting property rights, ensuring due process, and addressing the challenges faced by short-term rental operators who experience inconsistent regulatory practices across our state. I hope my personal experience of operating in Coventry Township illustrates the pressing need for a clear and standardized statewide framework.

A consistent, statewide regulatory framework is necessary to ensure fairness while still allowing for reasonable local input. Short Term Rental hosts should not be subject to constantly changing or inconsistently applied rules that vary from township to township. Without clear guardrails, enforcement becomes subjective, and good operators risk being punished due to bias, personal disputes, or unclear local policies.

Short-term rentals provide real value to local economies and communities. They generate tourism, increase local activity, and offer guests a more personal and memorable experience—something most hotels cannot replicate. In destinations like Portage Lakes, guests enjoy unique, family-friendly stays in lakefront homes that allow them to connect with Ohio's natural beauty. Most of our guests come to town to visit family and friends from the area. My properties contribute to the local economy by supporting nearby restaurants, grocery stores, boat rental shops, and many other small businesses.

Despite these benefits and my full compliance with local regulations, I've found myself entangled in a situation that highlights the very gaps Senate Bill 104 is designed to address.

In December 2023, I purchased a home in Coventry Township with the intent to operate it as a short-term rental. Prior to closing, I contacted the township zoning inspector on December 14, 2023 to confirm the property was eligible for such use. The zoning director confirmed that this property could be a short term rental and directed me to submit an application using a form available online. However, that form was not accessible. After several follow-ups, I finally received the application via email on January 8, 2024.

During this time, the township adopted a new zoning code requiring 300 feet of separation between short-term rental properties. As a result, another property in close proximity submitted its application first, and my submission was initially rejected—despite my good faith efforts to comply with the township’s process.

With legal representation, I ultimately obtained a conditional use permit after five months. As part of the permit, the board added a condition—prompted solely by a neighbor’s public comment—that required me to ensure their driveway was not blocked. I agreed to this parking condition and have honored it since the permit was issued.

Yet earlier this year, I was informed that my permit was being revoked. The decision was based on four parking complaints on three different incidents submitted by the same individual who initially opposed my permit and who owns all five properties surrounding my home. Some of the photos submitted were not guests of our home, and the remainder involved minor, quickly resolved misunderstandings about the parking instructions. I never received a citation or formal violation for a specific incident aside from one written reminder referencing the parking condition.

This situation has caused significant financial strain and emotional stress. I have invested heavily in this home, operated transparently, and complied with every rule and condition placed upon me. Still, I am now at risk of losing my right to operate—based solely on unverified, subjective complaints from a neighbor who has repeatedly challenged my right to operate and whose actions appear aimed at interfering with my ability to continue doing business.

Senate Bill 104 provides the legal clarity and procedural fairness that property owners like myself deserve. It allows local governments to maintain enforcement authority, while preventing selective enforcement and personal disputes from derailing legitimate operations. The bill protects communities—but also ensures that responsible hosts can operate with confidence, knowing that rules will be applied consistently and fairly.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass Senate Bill 104. It is a necessary step toward protecting property rights, ensuring due process, and fostering a balanced regulatory environment for short-term rentals across Ohio.

Sincerely,

Johnny Knight IV

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