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March 14, 2025

The Honorable Thomas F. Patton, Chairman
The Honorable Nickie J. Antonio, Ranking Member
Senate Transportation Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on Sub. H.B. No. 54. We are writing in opposition to Sec. 4511.206 of this bill, specifically the requirement that a driver must be physically present in an automated motor vehicle. We believe that automated motor vehicles provide the opportunity for technological and business advancement. Ohio can be a leader in this space by allowing platooning with a driver in the lead vehicle with the ability to control the autonomous follower vehicle or true (driverless) autonomous vehicles. Unfortunately, this bill as written would only serve to stifle innovation in the state.

GROWMARK is an agricultural cooperative serving almost 400,000 customers across North America, providing agronomy, energy, facility engineering and construction, and logistics products and services, as well as grain marketing and risk management services. Headquartered in Bloomington, Illinois, GROWMARK owns the FS trademark, which is used by member cooperatives. More information is available at GROWMARK.com.

The strain of the labor market is felt heavily in small agricultural communities. The timing sensitivity of agriculture creates short windows to complete harvest and move products. To combat the competitive and understaffed driver pool, the GROWMARK/FS System and others in the agribusiness industry are exploring the automated motor vehicle space as an option for our members as future technology develops.

Platooning of semis provides the opportunity to allow for greater efficiency in transportation by improving fuel economy and cutting down on congestion. These projects are only economical for businesses in the state to invest in if there only has to be a driver in the lead truck. If drivers are required in all trucks, there is no cost savings for the company to offset the expenditures of piloting the technology. Additionally, such requirements do not help with the driver shortage the trucking industry is currently facing. Automated platooning will increase highway safety, with quicker reaction times for the automated following trucks and consistent following distances calibrated to legal requirements.

In order to preserve Ohio's place at the forefront of innovation and to provide much-needed support to the agricultural workforce, we strongly encourage that Sec. 4511.206 be removed or that a reasonable

sunsetting of the provision that a driver be physically present in the automated motor vehicle be included to provide a signal to the companies looking to invest in this technology that such an investment could be economically feasible in the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Connor Kaeb', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Connor Kaeb
Associate Manager, Government Relations
GROWMARK, Inc.

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