

Opponent Testimony
House Bill 47
Betsy A. Pandora, MCRP
Executive Director
Short North Alliance

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Chairmen Brown and representatives of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today.

My name is Betsy Pandora and I am the Executive Director of the Short North Alliance.

The Short North Alliance is a non-profit organization which serves over 300 businesses and over 600 property owners on High Street in the Short North Arts District – located just a few short miles north of the Statehouse, here in Columbus.

The Short North Arts District is one of the brightest spots in our region and is an incredible success story and national model for urban revitalization. In the span of just 35 years, we have transitioned from one of the most dangerous, derelict, and disinvested areas of our community into an internationally acclaimed arts district, an economic development engine, a small business incubator, and one of the top tourism drivers for the urban core of Columbus.

We have been following the development of House Bill 47 in its various forms since the Senate approved it in December and have had numerous business and property owners reach out with concerns regarding the impact it could have on our neighborhood.

Namely, we fear that as drafted, this legislation could adversely and negatively impact the quality of life for our residents and property owners, safety of our visitors, and success of our small businesses in the Short North Arts District.

The Short North Arts District is not a traditional arts and entertainment district. We are a diverse and vibrant business, residential, and cultural community. Over 12,500 people live on High Street and within its adjacent neighborhoods. 73% of all businesses within the district are not bars and restaurants. And, many of our brick and mortar bar and restaurant owners on High Street view the idea of outdoor refreshment areas as unsafe, problematic, and harmful.

Daily, we deal with negative impacts of illegal open container use in our neighborhood and spend considerable time, energy, and resources to combat what seems to be a growing problem.

The legislation is being championed by a single city for a single purpose, in a neighborhood without as many residential or small business concerns. As drafted, it potentially has extreme ramifications for communities across the State of Ohio who have neither been property engaged nor consulted on its impacts.

Although the legislation allows for individual municipalities to adopt their own rules and regulations, the legislation still does not do enough to protect communities like ours who will see impacts from outdoor refreshment areas – whether they occur within our neighborhood or adjacent to it.

We believe the most concerning aspects of the legislation as drafted are its lack of specific requirements for safety around the boundaries of entertainment districts, it's lack of clarity of liability for safety and other issues that many result from outdoor

refreshment areas, and the fact that these districts, once created, are created for terms of five years.

We request that changes to the legislation be explored in order to ensure that all communities are protected and not harmed by it. Specifically, we would like to see requirements for public safety in outdoor refreshment areas with considerations for what happens at their boundaries, annual term limits for outdoor refreshment areas with a specific review process for renewal, and clarity on who is liable for people who are injured in or cause property damage within or adjacent to outdoor refreshment areas.

As drafted, we do not view this legislation as good for the Short North Arts District. Please consider changes to this legislation in order to protect the health, safety, and economic success of our vibrant community and of communities across Ohio.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify today.