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State Representative Tom Brinkman, Jr.

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Chairman Koehler, Vice Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, good afternoon. I appreciate this chance to testify on House Bill 124 concerning urban homesteading.

I am proud to say that this bill has been cosponsored in the last General Assembly and in this one by our colleagues from rural, suburban, and urban areas. The reason for this broad support is simple. Food security, food scarcity, and food freedom are issues in every part of Ohio.

On one hand, we have people who yearn to provide their own food from their own land, grow their own tomatoes, collect their backyard eggs and savor their morning omelets while feeling the accomplishment of providing it themselves. They want to teach their children where their food comes from and be good stewards of the small plots of Ohio land that they call home.

They are not farmers. They are teachers, utility workers, nurses, computer programmers, small business owners, and insurance salesmen; they are you and me. They want the freedom to use their land, to enjoy food naturally, and to pass that knowledge down to the next generation. Ohio's own 4-H was created for exactly this purpose.

On the other hand, we have people who grow and raise their own food out of genuine need. Ohio ranks one of the worst in the nation for people living in Food Deserts. This means that large numbers of Ohioans live without meaningful access to fresh food because their homes are too rural or their areas too impoverished to support a supermarket.

One would believe that Ohioans are free to grow their food, to raise a few chickens for fresh eggs, or even to raise rabbits as an easy source of fresh meat if they desire. I had never really thought about it myself, but if someone had asked me if it was legal I would have responded, "Of course! Why wouldn't it be?"

That is why I was shocked when I met a young woman who had been taken to court and fined for illegal chicken keeping and threatened with jail time if she did not give up her 6 backyard chickens. She told me of another woman, living in a food desert, who had been forced to give up her three breeding rabbits, which produced the meat that her family relied upon.

So I looked around and saw case after case of everyday Ohioans fighting and losing battles over this fundamental right of using their own property to raise their own food. And I knew I wanted to do something about it.

House Bill 124 is both simple and far-reaching in its goals to help Ohioans achieve food freedom and food access. This bill allows every person in our state to grow food on their own property and to responsibly raise small livestock such as chickens and rabbits. Families will be able to exercise their freedom to provide their own healthy food for their families.

More freedom. More food access. Healthier Ohio families. Thank you for your time, Chairman, and I would be happy to answer any questions of the Committee.

