

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and Members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for affording me this opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 307.

My name is Stephen Hightower II and I serve as the Chief Operating Officer of Hightower Petroleum.

Like many in our industry I represent a small family-owned business, we employ over 50 people in our hometown and we invest and give back to our home, Middletown, OH.

When my grandfather started our business in 1956 it was a janitorial business, which was a good business back then, but we continued to adapt change and grow to meet the changing times and needs.

Today Hightowers Petroleum Company is one of the largest independent fuel distributors in the United States, delivering a load of fuel every 7 minutes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are also proud members of the Ohio Energy and Convenience Association (OECA).

Once again, we have sensed the winds of change and have jumped into the burgeoning electric vehicle market, with Hightower EV. At this stage it's an investment that we are confident will pay off if the playing field is open and the markets are free.

There are major goals in the attempt to go electric and reduce the amount of carbon pollution, which I support. But for it to be successful, it will require participation of the most reliable and efficient distribution network – Retail Fuel Stations.

We embrace the change but as small business owners we must see a path to return on investment. Even with Federal support, EV charging stations are a considerable investment with precious limited space. Retailers are already reimagining the convenience store of the future where you have a place to recharge your mind and body while your electric vehicle powers up.

As we consider this legislation there are some things that this body should consider:

- Ohio should encourage private investment and free market approaches as it seeks to expand its EV infrastructure. The state should avoid artificial regulatory or legislative barriers that might keep retailers and other industries from participating in this process
- Ohio should avoid charging businesses and citizens with the cost of building EV infrastructure via demand charges and subsidies. These added costs would discourage private investment while having an adverse impact on the overall business climate of the state
- A fuel retailer should be represented on the state's EV taskforce
- Utilities will obviously place a crucial in this process, fuel retailers are ready to work with them in a collaborative manner to ensure Ohio builds the most robust and efficient EV infrastructure possible

We appreciate Sen. Rulli bringing the bill forward and stand ready to work with him to make the legislation even stronger. As the world rapidly changes, we must remain true to our free market

principals. Small and family-owned businesses and the thousands of families that work with us are counting on it.

Thank you for time and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.