



**Senate Bill 116
Written Proponent Testimony
Senate Insurance Committee
March 24, 2021**

Chair Hackett, Vice-Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 116, legislation that requires applicants for state unemployment benefits to provide proof of identify prior to receiving assistance.

By way of background, as President of the Ohio Grocers Association I proudly represent over 500 food retail, wholesale, and supply companies across the Buckeye state. My members range from the largest chain stores to the smallest “mom and pop” independent grocers as well as some convenience stores and of course the food wholesalers who supply these stores.

As you know, grocery retailers have been on the front line from the beginning and are always complying with each new protocol as mandated or advised from the State. From the cleaning protocols, limited store capacity, additional safety measures (barriers at checkout), self-service protocols and mask mandates (and subsequent mask enforcement), and more, our retailers have stepped up and done our part. I am sure you can understand that complying with all these mandates has cost us in our businesses – whether it is dollars or time – it has an impact on our operations.

The latest time cost expense we are in incurring during this pandemic surrounds ongoing unemployment fraud occurring in the state. It takes our retailers valuable hours to review, gather documentation and submit against these fraudulent claims. I can give you an example from one of my members: This retailer has had no less than five claims on the same person. He reported this comes out of the local JFS office and seemingly always made on a Sunday. In turn he repeatedly submitted paperwork denying this claim as no one by this name has ever worked at his store. However he received notice that this claim had been approved by the State and benefits would be issued. In fact, the owner himself has received two different PIN numbers to access accounts for himself on claims that he never made.

There are clearly severe structural issues with the unemployment system if these types of errors continue to occur. Unfortunately, this retailer is just one example of what I have been hearing from my members. By requiring applicants to provide proof of identify prior to receiving benefits, we believe the State can begin to address and ultimately prohibit fraudulent activity.

Senate Bill 116 is an important step in fixing these issues and has the full support of the Ohio Grocers Association. We urge your favorable consideration.

