**House Bill 160 – Verbal Testimony**

**Jennifer Williams, Owner, Weiland’s Market**

**December 4, 2019**

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Minority Member O’Brien, and members of the Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of House Bill 160, which would allow for the transportation and resale of alcoholic ice cream. If amended, House Bill 160 would also allow for on-premise consumption of high-proof liquor at select state agencies.

I am here today as a proponent for House Bill 160 as amended.

After 20 years at JPMorgan Chase, I became a fourth-generation grocer in 2011. My husband and I own Weiland’s Market in the North Columbus neighborhood of Clintonville. My Dad, John Williams, and George Weiland founded Weiland’s Fine Meats 58 years ago, in a small storefront with 3 employees. Our 20,000-square-foot store now employs 80 people. We have had a liquor agency since 2006, and we have held licenses for on-premise consumption of full glasses of beer and wine since 2015.

Currently, the Ohio Revised Code does not allow state liquor agencies to offer on-premise consumption of high-proof liquor. This legislative change would allow agency stores with at least 10,000 square feet to offer cocktails to customers during regular business hours.

My Dad was a gin & tonic guy. Back in the 70s, we would go to the state store at Graceland Shopping Center to buy gin. It was not at all a customer-friendly experience. There were bars on the windows, the guy behind the counter was there to take your money, not to answer questions about gin options, and the inside was painted an institutional green color. The state store brand was, “Get your liquor, give us your money, and go away.”

Thanks to the leadership of Liquor Superintendent James Canepa, the Ohio Department of Liquor Control has made significant forward progress over the last several years, becoming much more customer-oriented, vs. a government entity offering a commodity. This legislative change would allow the further forward, positive evolution of Ohio’s liquor brand. Grocery stores like ours already offer beer and wine to customers while they shop; offering a cocktail would be another beverage option.

There is no opposition to this Ohio Revised Code change. The Ohio Grocers Association is Positive. Commerce, which includes the Ohio Department of Liquor Control, is Neutral. The Wholesale Beer & Wine Association is Neutral.

Grocers who have already contacted legislators in support of this legislative change include Giant Eagle; Dave’s Markets in Cleveland; Bassett’s in Port Clinton; Buehler’s; Wagner’s in Northwest Ohio; and Caldwell Foods in Noble County.

We all firmly agree that serving high-proof liquor at an agency should be a privilege, not a right—just like all other alcohol licenses. In addition to the stringent regulations that are already in place to serve and sell alcohol, there will be an additional permit and $750 annual fee through Liquor Control.

On-premise consumption of high-proof liquor would be a selling tool, not a means for customers to stand around and get drunk. Allowing customers to drink high-proof cocktails would increase an agency’s sales—because samples sell. If a customer isn’t sure if they’ll like Mezcal, for example, they can try it in a cocktail, then buy a bottle from the agency to enjoy at home. Ultimately, higher agency sales will mean more revenue for Liquor Control and JobsOhio.

This Ohio Revised Code change would also help offset the losses that agencies incur from the 6% liquor commission fee, because we could set our own prices on cocktails. There is now an incentive plan with Liquor Control and JobsOhio for agencies to potentially earn an another 1% for performance starting with this fiscal year. However, Weiland’s loses about $100,000 annually on high-proof liquor because of the low commission rate. Although the commission is part of the agency deal with the state, I wouldn’t be much of a business owner if I didn’t want to try to offset these losses.

I appreciate the leadership of Representative Ingram and Senator Kunze for their sponsorship of this legislation and the amendment and urge your favorable consideration of House Bill 160 as amended.

Thank you for your time. I will be happy to answer any of your questions.