

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 338. My name is Tyler Pigman, and I am the Director of Environmental Health at the Marion Public Health Department. I oversee the inspection of over 300 restaurant, retail, and mobile food facilities in Marion County. It is an honor to come before you to advocate for this bill.

As an Environmental Health Specialist, I welcome a strict evaluation process that holds my peers and me to a high standard of food safety knowledge. However, the current field evaluation process is fraught with a lack of understanding of our food business partners. It is extremely time consuming not only for an inspector but a manager in a food facility as well. Also, the current process does not prioritize violations based on risk. A simple method to evaluate the inspector that would not be cumbersome to our food businesses would be to use a written test.

The Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Department of Agriculture Food Survey field evaluation is taking too much time from food managers and their employees. Normally a representative from the facility follows the State inspector and local health department inspector during an inspection. The inspections we perform are a snapshot in time. Each inspector is trained to maximize thoroughness and efficiency. However, during our last field evaluation each inspector averaged 8 hours of inspection time and write up per facility. This means managers or employees are spending a shift or more with us rather than doing their normal job. To show you a contrast of a field evaluation and a normal standard inspection, I analyzed the last 3 years' worth of inspections at the same locations that the state health departments evaluated. Using our data, we averaged 1.25 hours per inspection at these facilities compared to the 8 hours during a field evaluation.

The amount of time a field inspection currently takes is unreasonable to expect from managers and employees. With today's current supply chain issues, I would not want to be responsible for a manager not being able to order a product like baby formula because they were spending the whole day with the inspector. Our food industry partners are losing valuable time during this process.

The second major issue with the current process is the lack of prioritization of violations. During the field survey the inspector is to find as many violations as possible. This goes against good standard practices. Employees are trained to identify immediate and potential food threats in the field. Identifying these critical issues is not the end but the beginning of our

inspection. We work with the manager or employees to find a corrective action. Then we educate why it was an issue and how can we put a system in place so it will not be repeated. A field survey does not focus on the corrective action or the education component. The field survey is to find as many violations as possible regardless of risk. During our last survey, my inspectors were marked off because they did not violate a peeling sticker and a dumpster lid that was open.

We averaged 49.8 violations per inspection report during our field evaluation. A report with that many violations usually means immediate closure. When you include so many noncritical violations, it shows a false sense of poor sanitation and practices. Our local newspaper prints restaurant violations. The last thing we want to do is embarrass our food business partners. We decided to perform the 8-hour evaluation as a consultation and not an inspection to keep the results out of the press.

In closing, I ask the committee to support this bill. Not only for a more practical and pragmatic approach to assessing food safety knowledge, but to aid our private industry food partners. Our goal is to support our local businesses to help them succeed. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tyler Pigman, REHS  
Director of Environmental Health  
Marion Public Health