



OHIO TO ERIE TRAIL FUND

118 Graceland Blvd. #146

Columbus, OH 43214

www.ohioerietrail.org

RE: H. B. No. 64, Opponent Testimony, Tuesday, May 23, 2023, 11:00 am, Room 122

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking member Galonski and the members of the House Civil Justice committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony in opposition to House Bill 64.

My name is Jody Dzurainin and I represent the board of Directors of the Ohio to Erie Trail. I have been involved with the organization 12 years and became the Executive Director in 2021. Hopefully you are already aware of the highly-praised Ohio to Erie Trail which is a **326-mile collection of local multi-use trails**. This long-distance trail attracts an ever-increasing number of Ohio trail enthusiasts as well as out of state visitors who come specifically to experience this trail. The trail is named for the bodies of water it connects, the Ohio River and Lake Erie. The intended route for the complete trail is 90% done and currently follows short road connectors for the remaining 10%.

The Ohio to Erie Trail Fund charitable organization has been working on this initiative since 1991. The board of directors and its local partners, such as Park Districts, collaborate on these important trail projects and work with trail adjacent landowners to find common ground. I represent our Board of Directors and emeritus advisors who live, work and vote in numerous Ohio counties including Butler, Clark, Clermont, Cuyahoga, Delaware, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Holmes, Knox, Licking, Madison, Stark, Summit, Warren and Wayne counties.

On May 19, 2023, Ohio to Erie Trail President Tom Bilcze presented "An Outdoor Economy on the Rise" at the Miami Valley Cycling Summit in Dayton. We have forwarded this presentation to Chair Hillyer and welcome him to share it with the committee. It shows the dramatic increase in organized tour companies bringing groups of adventurers to Ohio to bicycle on this trail. They come to be rejuvenated by the natural surroundings and challenged by the 326-mile quest. People opting for these tours seek to hire experienced trail guides to help them navigate the route. In 2021 there were 3 organized weeklong tour groups and this year it has grown to 17 tours with groups of 10-20 people on each tour. Generally, these tour participants were born before 1955, live outside Ohio and prefer the comfort of having an experienced trail guide advise them on destinations, arrange lodging and transport their luggage. During the trip, the tour guests spend out-of-state money at Ohio shops, restaurants, farm markets and overnight lodging locations during their trip. This is precisely the type of initiative Tourism Ohio is focused on and we are pleased that our trail efforts have had a positive impact on the state's economy. Each year we see new businesses opening along the trail route. We are puzzled why the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants would come out against building Recreational Trails, which seems to ignore the segment of their constituency who depend on trail visitors for their livelihood. In Centerburg, which is the midpoint of the trail, Robert Lord owns and manages Kolacheez bakery cafe and actively promotes his coffee and baked goods to appreciative trail visitors.



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Our board has concerns about the specific definition stating that a recreational trail is not a valid “public use” if it is used for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, ski touring, canoeing, or other nonmotorized forms of recreational travel. These recreational trails are deeply appreciated and supported by the Amish community for the safe transportation corridor they provide. The trails in Holmes County are built extra wide with a special lane for horse-drawn buggies. This community has embraced the trail, both for the safer travel it enables and for the economic benefit they receive as tired and hungry trail visitors roll into town at a steady pace from spring to late fall.

Ohioans are excited about trails and consistently pressure their leadership to expand the networks and fill in the missing trail segments. Robust community trail systems are in high demand, especially with the population born after 1995. It's a true sign of success when we hear comments that reflect assumptions that these amenities have always been here because they are so popular and heavily utilized. We are pleased when we see 4H clubs and scout troops out enjoying and caring for the trail; today's youth are the trail stewards and voters of the future. The Ohio to Erie Trail has become an important visitor attraction benefiting the 27 communities and 15 counties it traverses, just as communities near Lake Erie and Hocking Hills recognize these natural attractions as something to preserve and promote.

The Ohio to Erie Trail is a valued state amenity. This is evidenced by the local addresses where we ship orders for our paper guides, half of our sales are to in-state residents, which means Ohioans are choosing to spend 3-8 days vacationing in their OWN state. This is because of this 326-mile network of Recreational Trails. House Bill 64 represents an extreme response to a rare situation. This limitation bill ignores the needs of the great numbers of Ohioans who regularly call upon their elected leaders to support the continued development of Ohio's popular trail system.

The Ohio to Erie Trail organization is strongly urging the House Civil Justice Committee to vote NO on House Bill 64.

If you would like to contact our organization, you can use the phone number or email address below or write to the address on our letterhead.

The Ohio to Erie Trail Fund

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