



Thomas F. Patton

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Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 455. This bill would create the Ohio-Ireland Trade Commission to further foster the relationship between the two regions.

This is a companion bill to Senate Bill 195, sponsored by Senator Nathan Manning and supported by deputy chairman of the Irish Senate, Mark Daly. As members of the American Irish State Legislators Caucus, we are proud to represent the 1.5 million Ohioans of Irish heritage with this bill. According to the Irish Embassy, Ohio and Ireland have exchanged nearly \$25 billion in goods and services over a four-year period from 2016-2020. In May 2023, Ireland's Aer Lingus launched a new direct flight between Cleveland, Ohio and Dublin, Ireland. Six months later, the Irish Embassy established the state's first Consulate office in Downtown Cleveland. We hope to see more diplomatic ties like these created as a result of this legislation.

Our offices have close relationships with Senator Mark Daly, as well as Mark Owens, the first Honorary Consul for Ireland to Ohio. Senator Daly has worked with the New Jersey and West Virginia legislatures to pass similar legislation in recent years. The Trade Commission established by this bill would be another important and mutually beneficial step in strengthening Ohio's relationship with Ireland.

The nine-member Commission created by this bill will study means of advancing the economic, educational, and cultural relationship between Ohio and Ireland. For example, the Commission will explore opportunities for bilateral trade and investment; policy issues of mutual interest; academic exchanges, and other opportunities as determined by the committee.

Membership of the Commission would include:

- Six members of the General Assembly – three senators appointed by the Senate President and three representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House – who have knowledge of, or past involvement in, organizations that promote Irish affairs, or have interest in the wellbeing of trade relations between Ohio and Ireland;
- Three members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, as follows:

- One member who represents a state institution of higher education;
- One member who represents the Ohio Chamber of Commerce or a successor organization that advances business interests in Ohio;
- One member who represents Irish American communities or Irish interests in Ohio.

It is important to note that this Commission is at no cost to the taxpayer as the Commission would raise the funds to do its work to visit Ireland and host visiting Irish Delegations.

We can explore how our shared industries, trade opportunities, tourism, and cultural ties can enhance our burgeoning relationship. We look forward to working with the Committee as this legislation moves forward. Thank you again for allowing us to deliver testimony on House Bill 455.