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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 17, 2021

**Ohio Hotel & Lodging Businesses Laud Legislative Action to Support Industry,
Warn of Prolonged Impacts**

COLUMBUS - Legislation passed by the Ohio General Assembly and signed by Governor Mike DeWine is a welcome first step of economic relief in the form of grants to lodging businesses in Ohio that have been impacted by the official response to the pandemic, the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association (OHLA) said today. Senate Bill 108, sponsored by Senators Stephen Huffman (R-Tipp City) and Mark Romanchuk (R-Ontario) appropriates \$25 million from the current state Fiscal Year 2021 which ends June 30, to be used by the Ohio Development Services Agency to provide immediate assistance. Grants will be in the amount of \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 and will be based on factors such as loss of revenue and occupancy due to the pandemic. But the industry cautions that full recovery will take several years and continued support will be critical to saving jobs and preserving travel infrastructure.

“Ohio’s hotel & lodging operators and the tens of thousands of employees who work in this industry – or are waiting to return to it – thank Ohio’s policymakers for their understanding of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the industry,” Joe Savarise, Executive Director of the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association, said. “During the height of pandemic closures, 70 percent of Ohio’s hotel & lodging workforce lost their jobs. While business is slowly returning, we are still the businesses most impacted by the remaining state health order.”

OHLA testified in support of S.B. 108 and companion legislation in the Ohio House, H.B. 169. These measures are a first step in a multilayered approach to providing hotel & lodging businesses a bridge to later in 2021, when a complete lifting of restrictions and a more sustainable level of business is more likely.

“Because of the nature of our business, where cancelled events in some instances may not be rebooked and return for several years after their original date, it will be 2023 at the earliest before we approach pre-pandemic levels of business,” Savarise said. “This support is an important step in helping preserve our travel infrastructure, which will contribute to economic recovery.”

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Hotel revenues in the United States fell 50 percent in 2020. This amounts to nearly \$5 billion in annual total sales in Ohio. Hotel occupancy was down by more than one-third for the year, and more than half of hotel rooms are projected to be unsold in 2021. Revenue and occupancy levels are not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until well into 2023. Ohio hotel property values have declined an average of 25 percent, and as much as 50 percent, since March 2020.

OHLA is also supporting funding in the state's two-year operating budget bill, House Bill 110, which includes provisions for additional funding for lodging business grants in the state Fiscal Year 2022, beginning July 1, and Fiscal Year 2023.

Key performance measures for Ohio hotel & lodging businesses such as occupancy, average rates and revenue are still far below 2019 levels. 96 percent of hotels are currently somewhat or severely understaffed.

A third tier of support is being pursued at the federal level with the introduction of the "Save Hotel Jobs Act" in Congress last week. The federal legislation would provide grants for three months of payroll and benefits costs. Lodging properties would need to demonstrate a revenue decline of 40 percent or more for a three-month period compared to 2019. The measure also provides tax credits for PPE of up to \$25,000.

About the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association: The Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association (OHLA) is one of America's oldest hotel associations. Founded in 1893, the mission of the OHLA is to provide advocacy, information, resources, and education for Ohio's lodging properties while promoting and assisting the growth of Ohio's travel economy. Its members are hotel & lodging businesses of all sizes, as well as companies that provide products, services, support and expertise to lodging operators and professionals.