



Downtown Vitality Act: Testimony Outline and Talking Points

Bill: H.228/S.130, An Act to promote downtown vitality

Sponsors: Rep. Tony Cabral and Sen. John Cronin

Committee: Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Businesses

TESTIMONY OUTLINE:

Below is an outline that you can use to create your own testimony for the Downtown Vitality Act.

- I. Intro
 - A. Individual: Hello Chair Payano, Chair McMurtry, and members of the committee for the opportunity to share my support for H.228 and S.130, An Act to promote downtown vitality. My name is [name] and I live in [town].
 - B. Organization: Hello Chair Payano, Chair McMurtry, and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is [name] and I am testifying on behalf of [organization] in [city/town]. I am here to share our strong support for H.228 and S.130, An Act to promote downtown vitality.

- II. Why Now?
 - A. The landscape of our downtowns is rapidly changing: online retail has diverted money away from local economies, many of which are still rebuilding from the disruptions of COVID-19.
 - B. Much of the creative sector relies on the vibrancy of downtowns and the broader economy benefits when we invest in arts and culture. When people attend shows and performances, they also shop, go to restaurants, and spend locally. However, cultural districts lack a funding mechanism to promote local creative economies.
 - C. Small business districts rely on vibrant, walkable, and robust areas to attract the sort of foot traffic needed to succeed in today's challenging commercial environment.

- D. Without a funding mechanism to promote our historic areas, urban squares, town centers, and rural villages, local governing bodies will not have the resources to invest in these parts of their cities and towns that draw in visitors and consumers.
- III. Share a personal / organizational story about how this is affecting you / your group.
- A. How could your business/organization/community benefit from investments in your local cultural district, business improvement district, or parking benefit district?
- B. What would/does it mean to your community to have a vibrant, walkable downtown?
- IV. Share why you believe this bill is part of the solution:
- A. About the bill:
1. *See talking points below*
- V. I / We strongly encourage the committee to provide a favorable report for H.228 and S.130, An Act to promote downtown vitality, and support its passage this session.

TALKING POINTS:

What is the Downtown Vitality Act? Why do we need this?

- H.228/S.130, sponsored by Rep. Tony Cabral and Sen. John Cronin
- This bill would establish the Downtown Vitality Fund and dedicate 5% of revenues from online sales in Massachusetts to support staffing and operations of cultural districts, business improvement districts, main street associations, and parking benefit districts in Gateway Cities and other low-income communities.
- Grants would need to be matched by local funding sources. Priority districts would include Gateway Cities and other low-income areas. Priority would be given to municipalities working to expand entrepreneurship opportunities among underrepresented communities, strengthen cultural identity and prevent cultural displacement.

- The bill is currently written so that guidelines would be developed by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED). The Healey Administration has since split this office into the Executive Office of Economic Development and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. The bill will need to be redrafted so that guidelines are developed by an existing Executive Office.
- The Act establishes a Downtown Vitality Advisory Board that will consist of 15 members who will advise the administering agency on the fund and review its activities. Proposed members of the Advisory Board would include MassDevelopment, Mass Cultural Council, business improvement district representatives, cultural district representatives, municipality leaders, and representatives from underrepresented communities.
- It would expand the use of funds raised through parking benefit districts to include district management activities and operations.
- The House and Senate would receive an annual report on funding activities.

Different arguments to consider:

- **Walkable and attractive downtowns are good for our communities.** Downtowns are social hubs for our communities, especially in areas of the Commonwealth with more regional or rural compositions. It is important that we cultivate downtown environments that are pedestrian friendly and welcoming.
- **Vibrant downtowns are good for small businesses.** Small businesses that survived the COVID-19 pandemic are also forced to adapt to a commercial landscape where more business transpires online. Investing in attractive downtown communities is necessary for inviting pedestrians to brick and mortar establishments.
- **Promoting downtown vitality will make Massachusetts a more desirable place to live and work.** People want to live, work, and visit places that are accessible, beautiful, and offer diverse attractions. Dedicating resources to cultural districts, business improvement districts, main street associations, and parking benefit districts will help municipalities make their cities and towns more competitive.
- **Increased tourism at the local level = increased tourism and greater revenues for the entire Commonwealth** - rising tides lift all boats. When

we enact policies to support our economy at the hyperlocal level, we in turn elevate the broader Massachusetts economy.