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**House Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee
H.B. 392 Proponent Testimony
Wyatt Bates, State Trustee District 21
Jackson, Pike, Scioto, and Vinton Counties
December 5, 2017**

Chairman Young, Vice Chair DeVitis, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the House Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 392, a bill that will provide certain immunity for Ohio's beekeepers.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of H.B. Bill 392, and the peace of mind it will provide Ohio's beekeepers. Honey bees are an invaluable asset to Ohio's fruit and vegetable growers by providing pollination services. Many crops that rely on honey bees for a significant amount of pollination activity readily come to mind, fruit trees such as apple, peach, pear and cherry. However there are many other crops that rely on honey bees as well – cucumbers, squash, watermelon, pumpkin, blueberries, and scores of others. The American Beekeeping Federation estimates honey bees contribute nearly \$20 billion to the value of U.S. crop production.

We are losing honey bee colonies every year for a number of reasons. While the managed colony population has steadily decreased over the past 50 years the need for agricultural pollination is ever increasing. The number of feral honey bee colonies has also declined dramatically. Without the assistance of modern beekeeping principles and practices, the number of feral colonies cannot provide the pollination services necessary for modern agriculture's needs. Apiarists are working with our farming community neighbors to determine ways to increase habitat and decrease risk from pesticide drift. We are also working with the scientific researchers to identify how to effectively treat honey bee diseases and pests, and we are working with our legislators to provide a legal environment that encourages more people in Ohio to take an interest in beekeeping without fear of reprisal.

The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation supports beekeeping operations by adopting policies that promote and support pollinators. OFBF supports the county bee inspection program administered by the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture. Policies also support and promote education and research by The Ohio State University and others.

Beekeepers are vital to the sustainability of the honey bee population. By adhering to best management practices as outlined by the Ohio State Beekeepers Association we are using the best methods to maintain healthy colonies.

We recognize that bees of many kinds, including honey bees, protect themselves and their homes by biting and stinging. Insects are abundant in nature and honey bees are only one of many that will sting when they feel threatened. But honey bees are not the only insects that sting and inject venom. Honey bees can travel up to a mile while foraging making it difficult to link a specific bee to a specific colony. And, while the number of feral colonies has dramatically declined over the years, it is not unheard of to find feral colonies and swarms from managed colonies living independently. Bees do not have identification marks linking them to certain beekeepers or a colony.

Of the 212,000 beekeepers in the United States, the vast majority - 200,000 are hobbyists or sideliners producing approximately 40% of the honey crop. The cost of defense against lawsuits would be devastating and would no doubt cause many to quit. It is important that we beekeepers are protected from liability when we are meeting the criteria set forth in this bill. We register apiaries in accordance with section 909.02 of the Ohio Revised Code. We comply with industry best management practices as established by the Ohio State Beekeepers Association. We utilize the services of the county bee inspector program. We adhere to all local zoning ordinances.

Therefore it is important that HB 392 is passed to limit the liability that beekeepers could potentially face.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I will take any questions you may have at this time.