



## Ohio State Beekeepers Association

[www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org](http://www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org)

[info@ohiostatebeekeepers.org](mailto:info@ohiostatebeekeepers.org)

Dec.5, 2017

### **Proponent Testimony- HB392 Apiary Owners Immunity**

Chairperson Young, Vice Chairperson DeVitis, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the House Economic Development, Commerce, and Labor Committee, the Ohio State Beekeepers Association is pleased to have the opportunity to speak about House Bill 392. We are appreciative of the sponsor of this bill: Representative Stein, and Cosponsors, Representatives Becker, Hambley, Henne, Hill, Kick, Koehler, Retherford, Riedel, Roegner, Thompson, and West. The members of this Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee have a constituent connection to this bill as the entire committees' constituents have a total of 2,034 registered beekeepers from your respective districts.

Managed honey bees, and the nearly 4,000 species of native pollinators in North America are responsible for ensuring crop yields in our fruits, nuts, vegetables, and seed crops. One third of an Ohioans' food is made possible by pollinators.

Eleven of Ohio's eighteen biggest cash crops rely on insect pollination to produce that crop: cucumbers, pumpkins, peppers, peaches, cabbage, strawberries, squash, apples, tomatoes, alfalfa/clover hay, and maple syrup reap more than \$600M in pollination services by honey bees and native pollinators.<sup>1</sup>

However, backyard gardens, community gardens, community supported agriculture, local and state park lands also benefit from the pollination ecosystem service provided by honey bees. These pollination services helping to beautify our city landscapes and gardens are provided by the honey bees kept by Ohio's 7,800 registered beekeepers.

The Ohio State Beekeepers Association educates Ohio's beekeepers on the Best Management Practices for beekeeping to help ensure beekeepers are good neighbors. We all know if a stinging incident occurs it is the registered beekeeper with the hive boxes in their backyard who will be singled out. Honey bees do not pollinate all plants, as honey bees are not native pollinators. Yet, the 4,000 North American native pollinators are critical to the pollination of Ohio's native plants, and to help control pests. Whether native bee or honey bee, stinging is a

last resort for this insect. If a honey bee stings they immediately die. Only a few native pollinators survive after stinging, and they only sting when attacked.

Whether a beekeeper has one hive in their backyard or a dozen bee yards with sixty colonies there is no method to definitively prove the stinging bee came from a specific colony. The short lifespan of bees, the diversity of bee genetics within a hive, the numbers of feral colonies of honey bees, and the two to five mile forage range of honey bees make it impossible to prove the owner of a honey bee.

I have been an instructor for beginner beekeepers for the past six years. The class size is approximately fifty students each year. On the first day of class we discuss some basic important tasks that the students must accomplish, before moving forward and investing in beekeeping equipment. Those tasks include checking your zoning and checking your homeowners insurance. Inevitably we lose three to four students after they have contacted their insurance agent learning they will lose their homeowners insurance coverage should they begin beekeeping due to the fear of potential stinging incidents. Beekeeping, just like any rural or urban farm activity has inherent risks when raising livestock. However, unlike the cattle or horse rancher where you can tell which animal stepped on your foot; the person stung by a honey bee or native bee cannot tell which insect stung them, or if a nearby beekeeper is the “owner” of that bee.

Like all small business enterprises, the profit margin is narrow for beekeeping and the various hive products. USDA surveyed beekeepers in 2016 who had five or more colonies and also qualified as a farm, and determined Ohio honey bee colonies average seventy-nine pounds of honey per colony selling for \$3.84 per pound. Total Ohio honey value for Ohio in 2016 was \$4,550,000. Like all farmers, beekeepers and their livestock, honey bees, are impacted by weather, drought, too much rain, and loss of forage reducing the health of their bees and the honey crop yield.

For almost twenty years I have kept honey bees in Medina County. During that time I have practiced best management practices and have never had a stinging incident with my neighbors. At times during the busy bee season my hive numbers reach well over one hundred hives. I feel this bill will reduce the insurance that I have in place to cover the bees, sales of hive products, and visitors to my property.

The Ohio State Beekeepers Association seeks to provide quality beekeeping education, and to protect the long history of beekeeping in Ohio. Per our mission we are here seeking your support of HB 392 to protect individual beekeepers from legal actions due to unknown stinging insects. HB 392 would not apply to intentional tortious conduct or acts of omission due to gross negligence on the part of the beekeeper. HB 392 will provide comfort and security to the 4-H student beekeeper and their parents, your beekeeper neighbor, and help to enforce local ordinances tied to responsible beekeeping practices.

Chairman Young, thank you for giving the Ohio State Beekeepers Association time to speak with you today. We would be pleased to answer any questions.

<sup>1</sup> The Buckeye State's 18 biggest cash crops,  
[http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2016/11/homegrown\\_ohio\\_the\\_states\\_big.html](http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2016/11/homegrown_ohio_the_states_big.html)

<b>Ohio House District</b>	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Number of registered beekeepers</b>
61	Ron Young	88
36	Anthony DiVitis	261
58	Michele Lepore-Hagan	79
89	Steven Arndt	46
27	Thomas Brinkman, Jr.	189
74	Bill Dean	44
16	Dave Greenspan	347
78	Ron Hood	36
31	Brigid Kelly	189
98	Al Landis	71
62	P. Scott Lipps	159
33	Alicia Reece	189
46	Michael Sheehy	125
57	Dick Stein	41
49	Thomas West	170

*Testimony formally submitted by:*

*Michele Colopy, Treasurer of Ohio State Beekeepers Assn.*

*Terry Lieberman- Smith, President-elect of Ohio State Beekeepers Assn.*

*Peggy Garnes, Vice President-elect of Ohio State Beekeepers Assn.*