

Mr. Chairman and committee members, my name is Dr. Jennifer Biegala and I regret that I could not make the trip to speak to you personally. I am speaking on behalf of the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge regarding House Bill 76.

The Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge was founded to support the mission and operations of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This is the only National Wildlife Refuge in the state of Ohio, drawing over 210,000 visitors in 2016. The refuge complex includes Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge, and West Sister Island National Wildlife Refuge which cover over 10,000 combined acres of forest, meadow, and marshland. The refuge is managed for waterfowl, shorebirds, neo-tropical migrant songbirds, and a variety of plant and animal species. West Sister Island is the largest Great Blue Heron and Great Egret rookery in the U.S. Great Lakes.

The refuge complex is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is staffed by 10 full-time employees. In 2016, the Friends group assisted with the management of the refuge by providing stipends for 5 interns and recruiting volunteers who donated over 6,538 hours of work. The Friends group also provided more than \$1,200 in subsidies to bring nearly 500 school children to the refuge on field trips. The group also sponsored refuge events such as Spring Migration, The Wildlife Stop and Shop, Lake Erie Wing Watch, the Annual Photography Contest, Cars for Critters, the Youth Waterfowl Hunt, Howl-o-ween, and the Holiday Open House. The Friends group has also helped with the acquisition and restoration of property to expand the refuge.

The license plate will help us raise funds to continue supporting the mission of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and ensure it is accessible for generations to come.

Thank you for your time!

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