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Dear Committee Members,

Good morning and thank you for your consideration of my concerns on the license pricing structure in SB257. I appreciate the customer service aspect of this bill that seeks to be an incentive for hunters and anglers to stay engaged – or return – to their passion by offering multi-year options. I do, however, hope you will consider changing the license pricing to no more than a 5% discount (as recommended in the prestigious Southwick reports commissioned by Ohio and Pennsylvania) – instead of the 12-14% discount reflected in the current edition of the legislation. There are several other issues already deeply affecting the finances of the Division of Wildlife. A discount this steep will add an additional burden that may take years to overcome. Customer service is admirable but should be done within the confines of what the budget can support.

In the State of the State address Gov. Kasich announced the new state park and wildlife area being created with the purchase of the Re-Creation Lands owned by American Electric Power. This is a multi-year purchase agreement and the bulk of the funding is to be through the Division of Wildlife. This is one of the most proactive things we can do for recruitment, retention and re-activation in the hunting and angling community. A purchase this large requires extensive resources. Reducing the license pricing to no more than a 5% discount would still be proactive to our license customers and yet preserve limited resources for the AEP project.

Funds for the Division of Wildlife are more precious than ever. Federal matching dollars from the excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment is on a downward trend since the presidential election. Ohio's share of that money will be significantly reduced. Additionally, the cost of licenses has stayed the same for 14 years even though the cost of doing business has risen.

It is imperative that we use our resources wisely. That includes not only our natural resources but our finances. We have to do as much as we can with what we have. Reducing the percentage of discount on the multi-year licenses to no more than 5% will be a big step in that direction.

Sincerely,
Karen Stewart-Linkhart