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**Ohio Farm Bureau Federation
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 553
Before the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Tony Seegers, Director of State Policy
May 27, 2020**

Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Tony Seegers and I am the director of state policy for Ohio Farm Bureau. Thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on HB 553 on behalf of the Ohio Farm Bureau and its members.

In the seven years I have been at Farm Bureau I have learned that if you want to strike up a conversation with a farmer you have just met, you can do so by 1.) asking how the crops or livestock are doing, 2.) ask if deer have caused crop damage or 3.) ask if coyotes are a problem. With coyotes being an especially hot topic among farmers, OFBF greatly appreciates and supports the provisions within HB 553 that provide needed clarification and protections relative to taking and possessing coyotes in Ohio. The provisions within HB 553 that are of particular importance to OFBF and its members include the provision that: “A person may take and possess a coyote year-round, and the chief of the division of wildlife shall not adopt any rule to the contrary.” In addition, we strongly support the provision amending ORC 1533.111 to read, “((J) A fur taker permit is not required to hunt or trap coyotes.”

Under longstanding rule, a fur taker permit is not required for anyone trapping or hunting coyotes, whether on their own land or the land of another. This bill will harmonize the law with this important exemption provided in rule. As coyotes pose a unique danger to farmers and livestock owners, OFBF supports legislation that will codify the exemption from obtaining a fur taker permit for anyone hunting or trapping coyotes. This codification will remove the potential for increased costs, additional hurdles and decreased opportunities for landowners seeking assistance from their neighbors and others in managing coyotes on the landowner’s property should the existing rule be amended.

HB 553 further provides a crucial safeguard and welcome reassurance to farmers and livestock owners that an open season on coyotes, whether through hunting or trapping, shall remain law in Ohio. Coyotes cause significant damage to Ohio’s livestock and poultry industry, particularly cattle, sheep, and goat operations. Hunting and trapping coyotes is an essential management tool to limit predation of livestock. Losses to livestock farmers can occur any time of year, but are greatest during calving, lambing, kidding, and fawning which traditionally occur outside of existing trapping dates for other furbearing species. Maintaining an open season for taking and possessing coyotes through any lawful means provides farmers, livestock owners, and landowners the options and flexibility they need to protect their livestock and their property without undue burden.

Opponents to this bill may point to the existence of current nuisance wild animal control provisions as a reason to allow for closing the coyote season in the future. However, the existence of these nuisance provisions does not alleviate the many burdens that would be caused should the coyote season be closed. In relying upon the nuisance provisions in a closed season, problems can arise if there is a disagreement as to whether the coyote taken was considered a “nuisance.” Further, relying upon the nuisance provisions would greatly decrease opportunities for landowners to seek assistance from others in managing problem coyotes on the landowner’s property, as anyone accepting a fee or compensation of *any kind* would need to be licensed commercial nuisance wild animal control operator. For instance, if a neighbor trapped a coyote for an elderly farmer and the farmer offered to give him gas money or free sweet corn as a thank you, that would be a violation of the nuisance statute.

In summary, HB 553 codifies important protections for Ohio farmers, livestock owners, and landowners to address predation and destruction from coyotes at any time of year without undue burden. Thank you again Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify today in support of HB 553. If you have questions, please contact me by email, tseegers@ofbf.org, or at 614-246-8265.