

Ohio House Finance Committee

Organization: **Ohio Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers**

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Good Afternoon Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chairman Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. My name is Benton Collins and I am a Board of Director for the Ohio Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. I am a volunteer and represent not only my board but over 550 members across the state of Ohio, and 35,000 members across the country. We are the fastest growing conservation organization in North America, representing a younger generation of sportsmen and women, with 68% of our membership between the ages of 18-45. The mission of our organization is to maintain, promote and protect access to public lands and waters for public land owners so we can enjoy many outdoor recreation activities.

I grew up in Henry County Ohio less than a mile from the Maumee River. My childhood was spent hunting, fishing, and recreating on what the locals call the "Muddy Maumee". As most of us know, the Maumee River is a major economic asset to the Northwest Ohio area due to its world-renowned walleye run. As I grew older I found myself spending a few weekends a year visiting and fishing on Lake Erie for some of

those same walleyes and perch. I have seen firsthand the highs and lows of Lake Erie during the algae blooms and how it can affect our everyday lives. Now I presently reside in Auglaize County Ohio between Lake Loramie and Grand Lake Saint Mary's which are bustling with activity daily from fisherman, boaters, and hikers. It goes without saying the troubles each of these waterways has experienced in my short lifespan thus far. From the sediment runoff in the Maumee, to the Toledo drinking water issue in Lake Erie, and the algae blooms on Lake Saint Mary's. That is why I am here today to voice my support for H.B. 7 so that we as Ohioan's can help protect, preserve, and restore the water quality of all lakes and rivers in Ohio. My wife and I recently gave birth to our first child and my hope is that this bill will be the foundation to allow her to live and grow up in a state that provides her countless opportunities to access and observe high quality water in our lakes and rivers.

My story is no different than any other member of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, those here in attendance today, or every other citizen of this state. Water and the quality of that water plays a role in all our lives whether we like it or not. It can be viewed as an economic driver, an avenue to allow some to hunt and fish or simply as a need in everyday life, but my hope is that this committee understands and takes advantage of the opportunity this bill provides for our state. Thank you for your time today.