



**Ohio Environmental Council**

[Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony - Ohio House Bill 59 (Rep. Wiggam)**

**Cassandra Kelly**

**March 6, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. My name is Cassandra Kelly and I am with the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Ohio House Bill 59.

Chairman Wiggam, I thank you for your leadership in sponsoring and shepherding the effort to designate April as Ohio Native Plant Month. Recognition of our native plants is important for so many reasons.

Our native plants are at the very core of our heritage as Americans and Ohioans. The American white oak is a great example. At one time, nearly half of all trees standing in southeast Ohio were white oaks. This magnificent tree built the American naval fleet that helped secure our nation's independence. Some years later our oaken ships defeated the British right here in Ohio at the battle of Put-in-Bay. Today, its significance can be found in bourbon, which is brewed in barrels made with white oak.

Through its acorns this mighty tree supports many wildlife species -- turkey, deer, grouse, and black bears, which have recently returned to Ohio for the first time since the late 1800s. White oaks also hosts more insect species than any other tree in Ohio. Because it supports so many insects, it likely supports more hungry baby songbirds than any other tree in Ohio, too.

And, it is nowhere close to alone. Blueberries, American hazelnuts, blue vervain, wild bergamot and milkweed, which hosts the beautiful Monarch butterfly -- are just a few of our many native species. They are great for wildlife and for people, and all are part of the original fabric of Ohio.

Many of these native species need our help. This includes the white oak, which is experiencing sharp declines in our state. To plant a native species -- whether flower, shrub, or tree -- is to provide for the future. The designation of April as Ohio Native Plant Month will honor our common heritage. It may also inspire the betterment of our state by and for many generations to come.

Chairman Wiggam, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 59. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.