

6/26/19
Ohio Senate

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee,

My name is Shawn Kaeser and I am a social studies teacher at Grizzell Middle School which is located in Dublin Ohio and I'm a resident there as well. I am here today to provide proponent testimony for SB 158 which would create a bullfrog license plate for the state of Ohio. I am a big fan of the bullfrog, Ohio wildlife and an even bigger fan of learning. Senate Bill 158 is about all of these and more.

The story of the bullfrog becoming a state symbol for Ohio starts back in 2002. This is when my students and I began the process of having the bullfrog join the other important animals, plants and symbols that represent the Buckeye State. We spent years calling and writing state lawmakers testifying to the importance of the bullfrog in Ohio and creating awareness for amphibians in general. After a great deal of work the bullfrog was named Ohio's state frog in 2010.

What a great symbol it is! The bullfrog is well known and easily recognized. Perhaps, this is because it is found in all 88 counties of Ohio including in our many state parks and wetlands. It is honored by communities across the state. Just last week in Dublin the Kiwanis held their annual Frog Jump for local families. Young and old turned out to enjoy a uniquely American summer tradition. Reportedly, the largest frog jump competition in the nation occurs annually in Valley City, Ohio in Medina County. Cities like Toledo are known for their connection to bullfrogs as Toledo was once known as 'Frog Town' due to their swampy conditions. Frogs even decorate the walls of the Lucas County Courthouse. From Lake Erie to the Ohio River the bullfrog is admired and loved. They are not only appreciated by Ohio sportsman and fisherman, but most Ohioans can recognize their iconic sound. It is the sound of summer and fun in Ohio.

So, now that the bullfrog is an Ohio symbol, it's time to take learning to the next level for my students. Becoming involved in their state is the best way to help them understand the legislative process. In the eight years it took for the bullfrog to gain recognition as the state frog, students became an integral part of the project. They became experts on a frog species, its environment and how a bill becomes a law in Ohio. It is so rewarding to see students engaged and excited about learning and democracy. Not only did the students benefit, but Project Bullfrog raised awareness across the state for amphibians and wetlands.

It is my hope that Project Bullfrog 2.0 will do this again. When these plates are created, children and parents all over Ohio and the nation will see them. As they drive families will talk about why the bullfrog? The bullfrog will join the ranks of other state symbols on license plates such as the cardinal and whitetail deer. Children will see the words “wetlands” on the plate and ask what is a wetland? I am excited about the conversations that will take place.

This seems like a wonderful way to draw attention to and increase understanding of the wildlife, wetlands, and state parks in Ohio. Wetlands are an important and vulnerable environment for wildlife and humans. The bullfrog is an integral part of its conservation. They are monitored by scientists and act as a warning sign of potential negative changes in the wetlands due to pollution. Senate Bill 158 designates the revenue raised from the bullfrog license plates to go towards wetlands in Ohio state parks.

I realize there are already a multitude of special license plates in Ohio. Some, like the military license plates are powerful reminders of selflessness and sacrifice. Others allow citizens to advocate for a cause. Specialized interest plates allow people to show their pride in their nation, state, or organization. An otherwise boring license plate becomes a way to express oneself and provides an opportunity to spread awareness. The frog included on the draft license plate is original artwork drawn and created by Grizzell Middle School’s art teacher, Todd Arnold specifically for the Ohio Bullfrog license plate. I believe, this bullfrog license plate would be a welcome addition to the list of options for Ohio drivers.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Senator Kunze and her staff for their support.