

State Representative Jim Hoops & Dick Stein
Sponsor Testimony House Bill 495
House Civil Justice Committee
February 26, 2020

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present House Bill 495 granting apiary owner immunity for bee sting personal injury lawsuits.

The intent of this legislation is to provide a defense where the plaintiff alleges a specific bee owned by a specific person caused them harm. This limitation of liability does not apply to intentional tortious conduct or acts or omission constituting gross negligence.

This legislation would provide immunity in such claims, provided the apiarist:

1. Is in compliance with local zoning ordinances
2. Registers their colony locations with the OH Dept. of Agriculture
3. Operates the apiary in compliance with existing provisions
4. Implements and are in compliance with best management practices defined by ODA

Honeybees and native pollinators are crucial to agriculture, world food security, and genetic crop-diversity. According to the USDA, pollinators are responsible for one-third of all the food we eat. Despite their immense value, honeybees are dying at alarming rates—the US EPA estimates over 25% of all bees are afflicted by colony collapse disorder each year. What's worse, is that there is no alternative for natural pollination

Today, there are over 7,400 registered beekeepers in Ohio with more than 49,000 colonies. Incentivizing best management practices will help the Ohio Department of Agriculture track the spread of disease and work with our extension offices to develop solutions. It is our hope ODA management practices will embolden municipalities to develop cohesive zoning policy with this framework.

Thank you for your attention.