

Public Testimony: HB 110
Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Matt Dolan, Chairman
Beth Jenkins, Serpent Mound Site Manager
June 3, 2021

Chairman Dolan and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Beth Jenkins and I am the site manager of Serpent Mound in Adams County. I'm sure many of you are familiar with Serpent Mound, but please allow me to remind you of why this place is so special and internationally significant.

Serpent Mound is believed to have been built by the Prehistoric American Indians who lived in Ohio perhaps 1,000 years ago or longer. Our site is famously known as the world's largest existing effigy mound, which means it is in the shape of an animal that resembles a coiled snake with what appears to be an egg in its mouth. Visitors and archaeologists continue to marvel about this sacred place, its meaning, and spiritual purpose(s). One thing that is not debated is its significance to rural southern Ohio, to the State of Ohio, or even its international importance. Serpent Mound came into the care of the Ohio History Connection in 1900 and is one of just 76 National Historic Landmarks in our state. It is on the "Tentative List" for World Heritage consideration in the future to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, Serpent Mound is simply amazing! Few would know this more than me. Although I grew up in Highland County, my father's family settled in eastern Adams County in a place called Mt. Unger sometime before the Civil War. Since 1910, Serpent Mound has been the location of our annual family reunions. So, I have many fond memories of visiting the site. I have the awesome privilege and responsibility of caring for this place each and every day. I don't mean from 9-5 Monday through Friday. I am talking about 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Serpent Mound draws record numbers of visitors from all corners of the world each year.

Since becoming site manager, my staff and I have often witnessed destructive, and sometimes disturbing behavior from visitors to the site. Serpent Mound attracts people who are accustomed to walking the grounds when the site is closed and unsupervised. In addition, inappropriate behavior (regardless of time of day) is commonplace and includes damaging the site (or effigy), disrupting other visitors, and practicing cult-like rituals that are incongruent to American Indian spiritual practices (or ceremonial sites). Please know, that we have many unmet security needs at our sites state-wide.

This kind of activity that I have witnessed at Serpent Mound, is cause for concern for the safety and security of not only the site, but of our visitors, and my staff.

I want to thank Sen. Terry Johnson for working with the Ohio History Connection to consider a budget amendment in support of providing some critical security measures that will allow us to

protect this national historic landmark for future generations. The Ohio History Connection has requested \$600,000 for hugely important security measures for Serpent Mound and other Ohio History Connection sites, \$100,000 in FY 2022 in support of next year's bicentennial of the birth of Ulysses S. Grant who was born and grew up in neighboring Clermont and Brown counties and \$100,000 in FY 2023 in support of Ohio's World Heritage initiative to get the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks added to the World Heritage List. Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot get Serpent Mound added to the World Heritage List until we get Ohio's Hopewell sites added – we're on track for some time in the next couple of years.

I'm here today, a public servant like you, to ask that the Ohio Senate add \$700,000 to Line 360-502 of the Ohio History Connection budget (Sites and Museum Operations). This is very important, and it will make a huge difference in our ability to protect places like Serpent Mound and keep them fully accessible not just for next year's visitors, but for future generations. I thank you for the opportunity to share this with you today, I am honored and humbled to be able to speak to you today on behalf of the Ohio History Connection, please help us continue our mission to promote and protect our state's historical sites. I would be happy to answer any questions you have of me.

Thank you