

House Committees

State & Local Government, Ranking Member  
Primary and Secondary Education  
Public Utilities Committee  
Ways & Means Committee  
Pensions Committee



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**Representative Sean Patrick Brennan  
14<sup>th</sup> House District**

Sponsor Testimony

H.B. 599: To Designate the Walleye as the Official State Fish of Ohio

Chair Wiggam, Vice-Chair Dean, Ranking Member me, and members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee – thank you for allowing us to present H.B. 599 - a bill that will finally designate the walleye as the official fish of the state of Ohio.

The idea for this bill *spawned* from a resident who emailed me a few weeks ago. I told him to give me a few days *walleye think it over...*

The statistics that Rep. Swearingen and I are about to present prove the case that the walleye – *sander vitreus* – is the only choice to be Ohio’s official state fish and that considering naming any other fish as such would be a *red herring*.

Ohio has an official state fossil, fruit, cultivated flower, wildflower, bird, tree, gemstone, beverage, song, rock song, insect, mammal, reptile, frog, and amphibian, but we are only one of three states, including Indiana and Iowa, that does not have an official state fish. This despite being home to nearly 30,000 miles of rivers, 60,000 miles of streams, and 312 miles of Lake Erie shoreline. In fact, although it is smallest of the Great Lakes, with only 2% of the total water volume, roughly 50% of the fish found throughout all of the Great Lakes call Lake Erie home. Further, Stone Lab at The Ohio State University has ranked Lake Erie among the most valuable freshwater commercial fisheries in the world.

Getting its name from its pearlescent eyes, which are due to a layer of tissue, the tapetum lucidum, which reflects light through the fish’s retinas to improve its night vision, the National Wildlife Federation already considers the Walleye the unofficial fish of Ohio and thousands of folks from around the world come to Ohio annually to fish Ohio’s Walleye Trail. In fact, recently I spoke to Jason Fischer who leads up the Lake Erie Walleye Federation, which puts on multiple big money walleye tournaments. He explained that walleye is *the fish* that brings anglers to Ohio, which is why Ohio’s portion of Lake Erie is already known as the walleye capital of the world to anglers from around the country and world.

Thriving in the cool waters of Lake Erie and the Ohio River, their tributaries, and stocked reservoirs, the economic impact of the toothy, glossy-eyed, white-bellied, olive- and gold-colored sportfish generates over \$1 billion for the Buckeye State each year – unmatched by any other fish.

In fact, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the statewide fishing effort for all fish statewide has an approximate economic impact of \$5.5 billion per year. Further, it is estimated that the total economic output of the sport fishery in the Ohio portion of Lake Erie to be valued at \$1.190 billion with 71% of the total sport fishing effort of private and charter boats on Lake Erie directed toward walleye. Further, about half of Ohio's 1 million anglers fish for walleye

According to the Ohio Division of Wildlife, there are 95 million walleye in Lake Erie at least 2 years or older, ready to be caught and kept. In comparison, there are roughly 600,000 white-tailed deer – our state mammal - across Ohio. Thus, there is close to 158 times more walleye in Lake Erie than there are deer in Ohio.

I want to thank my joint sponsor Rep. Swearingen who represents Erie and Ottawa counties, where I grew up and used to often fish as a young boy. In fact, I caught a Fish Ohio Walleye in 1986 off of Put-In-Bay and still have the certificate from my winning fish.

In past General Assemblies this bill has *floundered*. Let's work together to reel this one in and not let this bill *be the one that got away*.

Thank you for your consideration.