



500 Edgewood Ave  
Akron, OH 44307

Ohio House Ways and Means Committee  
House Bill 1 – Opposition Testimony  
Douglas Piekarz - President & C.E.O. - Akron Zoological Park

April 18, 2023

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, on behalf of the Akron Zoological Park, I am providing this written testimony to share concerns regarding elements of House Bill 1.

The Akron Zoo welcomes nearly 400,000 guests each year, making it Summit County's most visited attraction. Since 2011, the Akron Zoo has generated economic activity and fiscal benefits of over \$581 million across Summit County, generating nearly \$8 in economic impact for every \$1 of public support received.

In 2020, Summit County voters renewed the Zoo's 0.8 mil property tax levy (initially passed in 2000) and passed an additional .4 mil in new support with 60 percent of Summit County residents supporting the levy. The Zoo's levy funds approximately half of the zoo's annual operating budget, enables the Zoo to expand our habitats, continue our STEM-focused programming for schools and increase opportunities for the community to visit our Zoo. Our levy funding keeps the zoo, and our programs affordable for everyone as we attempt to connect all lives to wildlife while inspiring lifelong learning and conservation action.

House Bill 1 proposes to change several aspects of Ohio's real property tax and income tax. This testimony relates to House Bill 1's management of tax valuation of real property, because if passed, House Bill 1 will have a material negative impact on the Akron Zoo's revenue going forward.

If passed, House Bill 1 will reduce the assessment rate on real property from 35% to a maximum of 31.5%, which will cause great harm to local governments and levy-funded entities throughout the state like the Akron Zoo. House Bill 1 would create a total deficit of \$15,247,490 over the next ten years and will drastically reduce the Zoo's operating budget which will need to be offset by significant expense reductions.


The Akron Zoo aims to inspire all individuals to embrace lifelong learning. We recognize fulfillment of our mission is to ensure that all people are engaged with wildlife. As a premier provider of STEM and science-based education programs, the Zoo reached nearly 60,000 students in 2022. Almost half of the students served are in schools listed as “title 1” schools that receive federal funding to support low-income students. Additionally, the Akron Zoo offers several opportunities for free admission and participates in Museums for All, providing a nearly 80% discount on admission to families who qualify for EBT and SNAP benefits.

If passed, House Bill 1 will reduce the Zoo’s levy revenue by approximately \$1.52 million per year which will require the Akron Zoo to immediately cut \$1.52 million annually from our budget. We currently project that the only way the Zoo can offset the annual loss without cuts is to shift substantial funds from planned capital projects and education and special programming which will threaten the Zoo’s ability to remain inclusive and accessible to our community and have a significant impact on our ability to maintain our accreditation in the future. This will also significantly reduce the Zoo’s economic impact across Summit County.

Thank you for the opportunity to share feedback on how House Bill 1 would currently impact the Akron Zoo. I hope this information is helpful as discussions continue. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration and past support of the Akron Zoo.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas M. Piekarz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Douglas M. Piekarz  
President & C.E.O.  
Akron Zoological Park