



Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and all members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 33 on behalf the Lake Erie Marine Trades Association (LEMETA) and the Boating Associations of Ohio (BAO). Founded in 1957, our associations welcome boat dealers, marina operators, watercraft manufacturers, clubs, financial entities, other water-based organizations and the individual recreational boaters throughout the entire State of Ohio. My name is Michelle Burke and I serve as the President of LEMETA and the Executive Director of the BAO.

Ohio's access and abundance of water has an enormous economic impact to Ohio and attracts visitors from around the world. We thank Governor DeWine and members of the Ohio General Assembly for making protecting this asset a priority. Our members' focus and livelihood is recreational boating. To give you an idea of the scale of boating's impact in Ohio, a recently released economic impact study on boat in Ohio (and Ohio alone!) showed:

The economic impact of Ohio's boating industry in 2022 was \$6.40 billion, accounting for 45,856 jobs.

- The economic impact of Ohio's Recreational Boating was \$3.66 billion; 25,476 jobs.
- The economic impact of Ohio's Marine Trades industry was \$2.75 billion; 20,380 jobs.

\$6.40 BILLION!! Ohio Department of Taxation data shows that Ohio collected roughly \$18 million in sales tax from the sales of watercraft in the first half of 2022. Investing in Ohio's water is clearly a wise one. Governor DeWine has made the H2Ohio Program a key pillar of his administration. By creating a coordinated effort among state agencies and interested stakeholders, they have been able to study and craft creative, evidence-based strategies to combat algae blooms on Lake Erie and other waters. We were pleased to see the House version of the budget retained those robust funding proposals, and we hope the Senate will as well.

The boating economic study also looked at the impact among different water types. The study showed:

- \$1.3 billion was the 2022 economic impact of Ohio-based Lake Erie recreational boating,
- \$0.3 billion was the 2022 economic impact of Ohio-based Ohio River recreational boating
- \$2.5 billion was the 2022 economic impact of Inland boating.

Many of Ohio's inland lakes and streams are within our wonderful State Parks system. I am here in front of you today because we understand the House version of the budget did not fund the Parks and Recreation line item at the level as proposed in the Executive budget. The House reduced that line item to the tune of \$16 million. We respectfully ask the Senate return to the as-introduced level in your recommendations. Investing in our state parks to benefit boating is clearly a good investment based on the economic impact study and sales tax receipts. We understand that ODNR has plans to use much of those additional dollars to recruit and retain natural resources officers, which is very important to our industry.



LEMTA and BAO members saw many new and enthusiastic boaters during the pandemic. Ohioans were craving fun and recreational activities they could enjoy outside at a social distance with their family. Boating was a perfect fit! It is critically important that these new boaters have a safe experience boating so they continue to enjoy it for years to come. Having a strong and robust first responder crew to manage and monitor Ohio's waterways is a key part of safe boating.

In 2020 when the world shut down, Ohioans turned to the outdoors and Ohio's parks and waterways. We gained a tremendous number of new users, the economic impact of this was great. More importantly, people turned to the outdoors that never had engaged with these activities before. I know that ODNR's Division of Parks and Watercraft met the challenge and the influx of new users. Now is not the time to flatline their budget. Now is the time to build on this momentum. To keep the current users and gain more to our excellent outdoor recreation offerings in the State of Ohio.

Why is this important? We are all aware we have a mental health crisis in this country. Research studies have shown that being on the water and in nature has a positive impact on one's mental health! We are funding mental health initiatives. We need to continue to support our outdoor recreation initiatives as well. The two go hand in hand with one another.

Members of the committee, Ohio's boating and outdoor industry has a huge economic impact on the State of Ohio. We hope the state will continue to invest in Lake Erie and infrastructure around our Lakes and Rivers.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.