



Kirk Bloir, State 4-H Leader and Assistant Director, OSU Extension
College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Good afternoon, Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Kirk Bloir, and I serve as the Assistant Director for 4-H Youth Development and State 4-H leader in OSU Extension.

I am honored to submit this written proponent testimony for House Bill 162 on behalf of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University, which includes OSU Extension, and Ohio 4-H.

We are pleased to support House Bill 162, which honors Ohio's largest industry, agriculture, designating days for the state to recognize agriculture, farmers, FFA, and 4-H. We especially appreciate the House changes that inclusion of "4-H Week," which would take place the week leading up to the second Saturday in March.

4-H is the largest youth development organization in the nation, empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. It is delivered across the country through land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension. Ohio is the birthplace of 4-H. Although it is now in all fifty states and more than eighty countries, 4-H was first organized by A.B. Graham in 1902 in Clark County, Ohio. The organization was originally called the "Boys' and Girls' Agricultural Club," and its focus was on teaching youth about the environment, agriculture, and domestic sciences. Graham soon partnered with The Ohio State University, and the club spread to other Ohio counties. The Ohio State University hired Graham as its first director of Extension, years before the passage of the Smith Lever Act in 1914 that established the Cooperative Extension system nationwide. To this day, Ohio 4-H is still delivered by OSU Extension within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at Ohio State. Despite its growth and expansion to non-farming communities, Graham's basic aim for 4-H remains the same; it is meant to help "the development of youth as individuals and as responsible, productive members of the community in which they live."

In 2022, 131,102 youth across Ohio participated in 4-H community clubs, but also in camps, special interest (or SPIN) clubs, and through in-school and afterschool programming. Today, 4-H youth in Ohio can still learn about natural resources, food and nutrition, animal sciences, and agriculture. However, 4-H has expanded since the days of A.B. Graham to include learning opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), leadership and personal development, and the exploration of pathways toward future careers. For example, Ohio 4-H's Clovers Code program, which is sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education, Apple, and Google, offers youth in 50 counties the opportunity to explore computer programming. Other STEM programming allows youth to learn about robotics engineering and explore rocketry and space.

Importantly, 4-H also offers programming for youth to focus on their college and career goals following high school. One such program is the 4-H SPARK EXPO, which is a four-day overnight experience open to incoming high school freshmen. This program gives participating youth the opportunity to experience and stay on Ohio State's campus, a chance for them to develop valuable life skills, make new friends, fuel individual growth, and attend multiple career exploration sessions as they begin to think about their futures. Through its projects, activities, and programming like the SPARK EXPO, Ohio 4-H is developing the next generation of Ohio's workforce, not only in the agricultural sector, but also in STEM, natural resources, and beyond. 4-H's proven method of engaging youth over time with caring adult volunteers who mentor and coach them as they engage in hands-on learning to explore their sparks or interests results in youth who are well prepared to succeed in life. In Ohio 4-H, we inspire curiosity, fuel adventure, and build lifelong skills to grow Ohio's next generation of leaders, thinkers, doers, entrepreneurs, and agricultural workforce.

In the years since 1902, 4-H has grown and expanded to new audiences and to include new topics, while continuing to prepare youth to be responsible, productive, members of the workforce and their communities. As its birthplace, it is fitting that Ohio would have a week to celebrate 4-H and 4-H youth. We at OSU Extension 4-H Youth Development in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 162. Thank you for considering this bill, which would celebrate Ohio agriculture and agricultural education.