

Chair Miller, Vice Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of House Bill 312, which would designate the walleye as the official state fish of Ohio.

The Ohio Marine Trades Association (OMTA), founded in 1957 as the Lake Erie Marine Trades Association, proudly represents Ohio's recreational boating industry. Our membership includes boat dealers, marina operators, watercraft manufacturers, boating clubs, financial institutions, and thousands of recreational boaters across the state.

Recreational boating is not only a cherished pastime in Ohio—it is a major economic driver. According to a 2022 study by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, recreational boating generated an economic impact of **\$6.4 billion**, supporting **45,856 jobs** in our state. The same study revealed that fishing is one of the most significant uses of Ohio's waterways:

- **42.1%** of boating time on Lake Erie was spent fishing,
- **24.5%** of boating time on the Ohio River was spent fishing, and
- **32%** of boating time on inland waters was spent fishing.

Among all the species pursued by Ohio's anglers, the walleye stands above the rest. Lake Erie's walleye fishery is internationally renowned—so much so that the lake has earned the title **“Walleye Capital of the World.”** The Division of Wildlife projects that the 2024 adult walleye population will rank among the top 25% of the last 30 years, comparable to the extraordinary runs of the 1980s. This is a point of pride for Ohio, and a testament to the importance of the species to our culture, economy, and natural heritage.

Just as Ohio has honored the cardinal as our state bird and the buckeye as our state tree, it is fitting and overdue to recognize a state fish. The walleye, beloved by anglers and symbolic of Ohio's world-class natural resources, is the perfect choice.

OMTA sincerely thanks Representatives Brennan and Swearingen for reintroducing this legislation and urges the Committee to advance House Bill 312. On behalf of Ohio's recreational boating and fishing community, we ask for your support in designating the walleye as Ohio's official state fish.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.