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September 30th, 2025

H.B. 312: To designate the Walleye as the official state fish of Ohio

Hello everyone, my name is Matthew Kowalewski from Parma and I would just like to say thank you Chair Miller, Rep. Brennan and Rep Swearingen and many others for graciously inviting me down to give testimony on H.B. 312 as I believe this bill is **no red herring, but the reel deal**

As a proud resident of this great state we call home, I've always been inspired by Ohio's spirit of innovation. We're a state of many so many firsts, I could only include a few personal favorites in the essence of time — America's first traffic light, Oberlin college being the first to admit African American students and grant women degrees in a co-ed program, and the Wright Brothers' dream of flight taking off from Dayton. But I must say, I was stunned and disappointed to learn that we are still among **JUST 3** states — along with Iowa and Indiana — that do not have an official state fish. Honestly, **I felt like a fish out of water** hearing that news. So I did a little digging and found that the Walleye is already considered the 'unofficial state fish' — which led me to give Rep Brennan a call.

As Rep Brennan cast out his line in search of answers to this fishiness, here are some key facts and figures as to why the Walleye should be our state fish.

1. The Walleye through sport fishing and charter boating throughout this great state brings in just over \$1 billion dollars annually while supporting 34,000 jobs.
2. We have official designations for the following, Mammal, Amphibian, Frog, Flower, Bird, Tree, Song and even Gemstone just to name a few.
3. As mentioned before, our state mammal is the beautiful white tailed deer with a rough population estimate of 600,000, warranting its designation as our state mammal.. Meanwhile, roughly 95 million (which is 158 times more) Walleye call our great lake home, truly making us the Walleye capital of the world. Even with roughly 95 million Walleye in Lake Erie, that species has had no recognition by this legislature.

4. The Walleye is more than just a fish — it's a true regional symbol and cultural icon for our state. In fact, Ohio proudly holds the title of the 'Walleye Capital of the World.' Each year, the city of Port Clinton celebrates this legacy by hosting the annual Walleye Festival and ringing in the New Year with the beloved Walleye Drop.

Allow me to echo a point made by Rep Sweringer 1 year ago. Imagine a future where this bill does not pass, a future where Ohio stands alone as the last fishless state. You sit on your couch, in the company of those you love, and watch the Ohio State Buckeyes trounce Iowa or steamroll over Indiana. You're filled with joy at our victory, but part of you is occupied by a deep sadness. You regretfully recall that you did not do everything you could to pass this bill and give our state the fish she deserves. The embarrassment of being the last state not to have an official fish will never be lived down. - Let us change this future!

As I come to the end of my remarks, I have a quick personal story about the Walleye to tell. My grandfather came here from Poland in the 1950s for a better life and chose this great state. After having kids, he would regularly take my dad and uncle out to Lake Erie to fish for walleye a few times a month. I've heard countless stories of their time angling for Walleye and I know many of the state officials in this building and state have many similar stories to tell as well.

Today, I stand before you in the great halls of this Ohio Statehouse — a chamber that has served as the heart of our democracy for 164 years. And I speak not only as a proud Ohioan, but on behalf of the 95 million walleye that call Lake Erie home. I urge you: let's not let House Bill 312 be just another one that got away. Let's seize this moment, cast our lines with purpose, and finally give Ohio — and our Great Lake — the official state fish it deserves: the Walleye. This isn't just about a fish — it's about pride, tradition, and recognizing a symbol that unites families, sportsmen, and communities across our state. Let's make history — and reel this one in for good.

Thank You