SHORES & ISLANDS OHIO

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Ohio House of Representatives
Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee

Chair Miller, Vice-Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and all members of the House Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of Shores & Island Ohio, the destination marketing organization for Erie and Ottawa Counties, to express our organization's support for HB 312 that would establish the walleye as Ohio's official state fish.

I feel confident I also speak on behalf of 500,000 anglers who annually fish in Ohio's Lake Erie waters, over 970 Ohio-licensed charter captains, and the estimated 77 million walleye that are swimming the waters of Lake Erie.

These numbers are provided by the Ohio Division of Wildlife that also reports that in 2024, 79% of the fishing effort on Lake Erie was targeted at catching walleye. While yellow perch, small and largemouth bass, steelhead, catfish, and other species are also popular sportfish in Ohio, it is the walleye that sits atop the water column in terms of popularity, economic impact, and in the opinions of millions of seafood lovers, taste.

Regarding economic impact, Lake Erie fisheries contribute nearly $1billion in impact to Ohio annually. With 79% of the fishing targeted at walleye, one can easily see this species' importance to Ohio's fishery and economy. Thanks to the Ohio Division of Wildlife's expert management, Ohio's population of walleye is solid and sustainable with the 2024 harvest of walleye (9.31 million fish), the highest documented since 1988, and several years of outstanding walleye hatches that ensure continued large populations.

It's no surprise that tens of thousands of anglers from over 35 states travel to Ohio annually to fish for walleye, even though they have walleye populations in their own state. It's no surprise that Port Clinton and the western basin of Lake Erie is known as the *Walleye Capital of the World* and the *Walleye Drop* event draws thousands to downtown Port Clinton each New Years Eve. It's no surprise that Toledo named their Conference Champion hockey team, the *Walleye.*

It's time for Ohio to finally have an official state fish, and for all the reasons I and other proponents have mentioned, there's only one clear choice… sander vitreus – The Mighty Walleye!

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Larry Fletcher
President/CEO, Shores & Islands Ohio