

Proponent Testimony for Ohio House Bill 312

Submitted by Captain Peg VanVleet

Charter Captain, Blue Sky Charters

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TO: Chair Miller, Vice-Chair Hiner, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the House Arts, Athletics, and Tourism Committee – thank you for allowing my testimony in support of House Bill 312, for a bill that will finally designate the walleye as the official state fish of Ohio.

As a charter captain with Blue Sky Charters, I've spent many years guiding anglers on Lake Erie, where walleye has always been our primary target. This species is not only iconic to our waters — it's the lifeblood of Ohio's sport fishing industry. Every year, walleye fishing brings millions of dollars into our local economy, supporting small businesses, tourism, and jobs across the region.

Lake Erie is known as the Walleye Fishing Capital of the World — a title earned through decades of unmatched fishing opportunities, thriving populations, and passionate anglers. It's a destination that draws people from across the country and beyond, all eager to experience the thrill of landing a Lake Erie walleye.

Recent surveys show that over 500,000 anglers fish in Ohio's waters of Lake Erie annually, accounting for more than 250,000 fishing trips. In 2024 alone, anglers spent over 3.7 million hours on the lake. Non-resident anglers — who come from 35 or more states and other countries — make up as much as 20% of those surveyed. And for the 2025 season, Ohio has licensed over 970 charter captains. These numbers speak volumes about the reach and impact of walleye fishing in our state.

I've seen firsthand how walleye fishing connects families, fuels seasonal traditions, and fosters a deep appreciation for Ohio's natural resources. From spring river runs to summer trolling, the pursuit of walleye is a shared passion that spans generations and communities.

Designating the walleye as our state fish is a meaningful way to honor its cultural, recreational, and economic significance. It's a symbol of pride for those of us who live and work along the lake — and for the thousands who travel here to experience it.

I commend Representative Sean Brennan of Ohio House District 14 and Representative DJ Swearingen for co-sponsoring this bill, and I respectfully urge the committee to support HB 312 and recognize the walleye's rightful place as a symbol of Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Captain Peg VanVleet

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