

Testimony of Leigh Ann Miller
Executive Director, Grange Insurance Audubon Center, Columbus
Interim Director, Aullwood Audubon Center & Farm, Dayton
Before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
May 14, 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and distinguished members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Leigh Ann Miller, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Grange Insurance Audubon Center in Columbus and Interim Director of the Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm in Dayton. I am here today to respectfully request that the Senate retain a modest appropriation added by the House of \$100,000 in each fiscal year to support our education programs. At these centers we are increasing science literacy, fostering community connections, and developing future STEM leaders for Ohio's workforce.

Our Conservation Impact in Ohio

The Grange Insurance Audubon Center and Aullwood Audubon Center are two of 32 Conservation Action Centers in the National Audubon Society network. Together, we welcome more than 100,000 visitors annually and employ more than 42 Ohioans. Our centers serve as anchors for youth education, bird tourism, and community engagement in the Columbus and Dayton regions.

Aullwood Audubon, established in 1957, holds the distinction of being the first Audubon nature center in the Midwest. For almost 70 years, it has provided hands-on learning opportunities, connecting youth and families to the natural and agricultural worlds throughout the Greater Miami Valley.

The Grange Insurance Audubon Center, established in 2009, stands as a national model for urban conservation. Located just one mile from downtown Columbus within the Scioto Audubon Metro Park, it represents a successful urban reclamation project jointly developed by Audubon, the City of Columbus, and Franklin County Metro Parks.

Our Educational Programming

Your support of Ohio's Audubon Centers will provide essential education programming that reaches thousands of Ohio students annually.

At Aullwood, our professional naturalist educators host field trips that align with Ohio's Learning Standards, STEM-based programming for secondary students, and interactive music and art residencies. Our signature READS Program—now in its 24th year—provides a 10-week immersive after-school experience for third graders combining mentoring, reading tutoring, and outdoor exploration. Additionally, our Summer Earth Adventures camp serves kids ages 5-12 with full-day nature-based experiences. In 2024, we served over 5,500 youth.

At the Grange Center, our flagship Conservation Classroom program has served Columbus City Schools for over 16 years. This program brings fourth and fifth grade students to the center three times annually for science curriculum enhancement. We've served over 4,250 youth in 2024 alone through partnerships with Columbus City Community Recreation Centers, Homes for Families Foundation, Columbus HeadStart Program, Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services, and Columbus Metropolitan Libraries.

Funding Request and Budget

We are requesting that the Senate maintain the \$200,000 in funding added by the House. This funding would support:

- Education staffing
- Education supplies
- Field trip transportation costs
- Staff training

Economic and Community Impact

Our centers bring significant economic benefits to Ohio through:

- Bird tourism
- Serving as destination attractions
- Creating meaningful employment for Ohioans
- Inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders

Conclusion

The work of our centers extends far beyond environmental education—we are increasing science literacy, fostering community connections, and developing future STEM leaders for Ohio's workforce. Your support would enable us to continue and expand this vital mission.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.