

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Catherine Knoop and I work with adults and students at BBBS Camp Oty'Okwa, Population Education and CISV, International. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 96 on behalf of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. Specifically, I ask that you retain the funding for the division as it was presented in Governor DeWine's proposed fiscal year 2026-2027 operating budget and was recently passed by the House of Representative.

As an environmental educator, I treasure the resources we have in Ohio's State Nature Preserves and often use these areas for instruction. Helping adult participants understand our threatened habitats and learn about our native and often rare species, promotes their ability to be good stewards of our state environments and gives them the ability and desire to protect our state's natural resources. Working with international organizations, I again use our natural areas for visitation and education. Our intercultural guests/educators are often amazed at the resources found in our state. Students in Ohio love to be involved in our State Nature Preserves, whether it is through environmental workshops, service projects, or research projects. The over 100 State Nature Preserves protect the best of Ohio, providing a resource for education and enjoyment. This effort to protect quality preserves in a state that is heavily developed will continue to provide protection for threatened habitats, protection of rare species, and eradication of invasive species, providing quality Nature Preserves for future generation's education and enjoyment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have.