



Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 96.

My name is Ron Gorley, and I am voicing support for ODNR Parks and Watercraft. I am a volunteer with the Friends of the Little Miami State Park. The Little Miami State Park is a 50-mile-long, 66-foot-wide trail that runs from Cincinnati to Xenia. I'll share a few thoughts about Ohio State Parks in general and then spend the rest of this testimony discussing the Little Miami State Park.

My wife and I are frequent campers. We've camped at many of the 76 state parks in Ohio. We've never been disappointed. We enjoy the condition and amenities of the campgrounds and the diverse opportunities to hike and explore. It's convenient to have such wonderful opportunities nearby so we don't need to travel far away to enjoy camping.

A few years ago, I was a Boy Scout Scoutmaster. Our troop camped almost exclusively at Ohio state parks. It was a wonderful opportunity to share nature and wholesomeness with these youngsters.



We in Ohio are lucky to have one of the finest Park, River and Natural Resource systems in the country. Each Ohio state park is unique with their own unique natural features. The ODNR system of parks, lakes and rivers is a system that supports:

- Boating, swimming and fishing on its many lakes
- Canoeing and kayaking on the scenic rivers
- Hiking and backpacking through its forests and meadows
- Camping from primitive to full recreational vehicle hookup sites

Specifically, at the Little Miami State Park, each year, we log approximately 1.5 million trail visits. During the height of the pandemic, this grew to 2.2 million. The park gave people a space where they could feel comfortable, even in an uncomfortable time.

Personally, I've seen not only hikers and cyclists on the trail, but also in-line skaters, horse riders and even a team of huskies pulling a man on a sled with wheels. Where else can such a diverse group of activities share a common space?

Not only do people from the local community use the trail, but I've talked with people from as far away as San Diego and the State of Washington. Our trail, this state park, was featured in a Wall Street Journal article as one of three recommended rails-to-trails destinations. Influential YouTube content creators regularly highlight this state park as a must-see destination.



It's well documented that trails have a positive economic impact on the community. For example, a 2018 study by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission showed that this trail network is responsible for an additional \$13.4 million in economic activity annually.

The Little Miami State Park has brought economic benefit to the four counties and the many municipalities along the trail. In housing development, Miami Bluffs and Peters Cartridge Factory Apartments were intentionally built with direct access to the trail.

And there are numerous restaurants adjacent to the trail, including establishments in Miamiville, Loveland, Hamilton Township, South Lebanon, Morrow, Oregonia and Corwin.

But to have a destination that the local community loves and that draws people in from around the county, investment has to be made. People need to be on staff and equipment needs to be provided to ensure that it remains a desirable and safe place to spend time. And resources need to be provided so the park can be properly maintained.

With all these benefits to the well-being and enjoyment of Ohioans and the positive economic impact on the community, I wholeheartedly ask you to fully support ODNR's budget through House Bill 96, including the restoration of the \$40 million in oil and gas lease funding that was removed in the House.

Thank you.