

# BLACK SWAMP BIRD OBSERVATORY

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*TEAMING RESEARCH WITH EDUCATION TO PROMOTE BIRD CONSERVATION*

May 23, 2025

Senate Finance Committee  
Statehouse, Senate Building  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory to express our concerns regarding amendment SC 0197 proposed in the FY2026-27 State Operating Budget. Our organization is committed to the conservation of birds and their habitats, and we are the organizer and host of the world-renowned event, The Biggest Week In American Birding (The Biggest Week).

As you may know, The Biggest Week is the largest birding festival in the world, and one of the largest festivals of any kind in Ohio, attracting between 80,000 and 90,000 visitors to northwest Ohio each spring. This remarkable festival brings together individuals from every state, more than 50 countries, and attendees have registered from all seven continents. The vibrant influx of visitors not only fosters a greater appreciation for our natural world but also serves as a significant economic engine for our region. The economic impact generated by The Biggest Week exceeds \$40 million annually, supporting local businesses, from hotels and restaurants to retail shops and local attractions. With a small staff of eight, and with so much more to our mission beyond The Biggest Week, we rely heavily on partners that provide essential services to make the event a success.

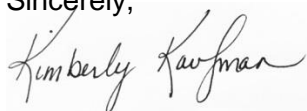
Our partnership with Shores & Islands Ohio has been instrumental in amplifying the festival's marketing efforts. Their expertise has played a pivotal role in ensuring that The Biggest Week continues to attract a diverse and global audience, which in turn enriches our community and bolsters our state's reputation as a premier birding destination.

Amendment SC 0197 stands to undermine this success. By allowing counties to redirect lodging tax revenues, this amendment could weaken the very support system that helps make The Biggest Week possible and risk diminishing not only the festival itself, but also the broader economic and cultural benefits that it brings to our region.

We urge the members of the Senate Finance Committee to reconsider the implications of this amendment. Supporting The Biggest Week In American Birding means investing in Ohio's natural heritage, tourism, and economy. We hope that you will champion our mission and the thriving community that benefits from this celebrated event.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We appreciate your continued support of the initiatives that promote conservation, tourism, and economic growth in our state.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Kaufman, Executive Director  
Black Swamp Bird Observatory