

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Barbara Andreas, Ph.D., and I am a Professor Emeritus from Kent State University. I am an inductee into the Department of Natural Resources' Hall of Fame. Early in my career, I worked as a temporary employee of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP), and continue to volunteer at several DNAP preserves in southeast Ohio. From 1983 – 1992, I was Governor-appointed to the Natural Areas Council.

Thank you for giving 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 that was recently passed by the House of Representatives.

Unlike any other Division of the Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves protects and manages plant communities that have existed since the Wisconsin glacial advance, approximately 20,000 to 15,000 years ago. These properties (nature preserves) owned by the State of Ohio and managed by the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, are unique and irreplaceable. It is only through the care, knowledge, and management by DNAP staff that these areas remain on the Ohio landscape.

DNAP's preserve managers are constantly removing invasive species that have never been part of the natural processes in these natural areas. Without the continued management of these natural areas, Ohio citizens would never have the opportunity to see examples of Ohio's natural heritage. These Preserves will not continue to exist without the manpower, equipment, and management that require continued funding. It is important that the 2026-2027 operating budget be maintained as proposed.

The citizens of Ohio are fortunate to have a system of natural areas that are protected by a staff of dedicated employees. I cannot stress enough that the staffing and operational needs of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves be funded as proposed in order to sustain DNAP's current operational standards.

Not to fund DNAP's proposed budget hurts Ohio's citizens who frequent these preserves. It hurts the biological significance of these areas. In Ohio, these Pleistocene glacial relicts exist at the southernmost boundaries of glaciation in the United States. It is important to maintain them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.