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Good afternoon Chairwoman Roegner and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on a matter of great importance to Ohio and its residents: the right to hunt and fish. My name is Luke Hilgemann, and I am the CEO of the International Order of T. Roosevelt and T. Roosevelt Action. I stand before you not only as an advocate for these cherished activities but as a passionate supporter of the many benefits they bring to your communities, your economy, and your environment. I would also like to express my gratitude to Senator Huffman for introducing Senate Joint Resolution 8 and to you, Chairwoman Roegner, for your leadership as a champion in advancing this critical measure through the committee.

Hunting and fishing are not just recreational activities in Ohio; they are deeply rooted in the Buckeye State's heritage and serve as economic engines that drive growth across the state. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, sportsmen contribute over \$1.9 billion to Ohio's economy each year, with hunting alone generating \$1.3 billion annually and supporting 15,500 jobs, while fishing adds another \$2.5 billion and 18,850 jobs. This includes expenditures on gear, licenses, travel, and lodging, creating a ripple effect that benefits local businesses like hotels, restaurants, and outdoor retailers—particularly in rural areas where these activities can be a lifeline for communities.

Beyond economics, hunting and fishing foster family traditions and cultural significance that have been passed down through generations. Families gather in the great outdoors to teach respect for wildlife, instill values like patience, perseverance, and teamwork, and encourage youth to become stewards of the environment. These activities connect us to nature and build a sense of responsibility that strengthens our communities.

In today's world, where food security is an increasing concern, hunting and fishing also provide a sustainable source of nutritious food. Ohio's rich wildlife and waterways allow families to supplement their diets with healthy, wild-caught or harvested protein. Hunters are especially generous, with a strong tradition of feeding the hungry—last year alone, Ohio hunters donated 1,157 deer through the state program, involving 79 charitable organizations. Just one donated deer yields 50 pounds of venison, providing over 200 meals for those in need. By supporting SJR 2, you empower Ohioans to enhance food security, promote healthier lifestyles, and foster greater self-sufficiency.

Let us not forget the critical role sportsmen play in conservation. American hunters contribute nearly \$9.4 million daily—over \$3.4 billion annually—for conservation nationwide. In Ohio, through the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts, hunters, anglers, and gun owners tax themselves on every fishing hook, round of ammunition, firearm, or archery equipment purchased. In fiscal year 2023, these programs generated nearly \$32 million for Ohio's conservation projects, including \$23.5 million from Pittman-Robertson and \$8.4 million from Dingell-Johnson. These funds support habitat restoration, wildlife management, and ecosystem preservation, ensuring sustainable populations and protecting our



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natural landscapes. The right to hunt and fish is inextricably linked to the health of our environment—sportsmen aren't just users of these resources; they are its primary funders and guardians.

Yet, despite these profound benefits, Ohio faces unprecedented challenges to these traditions. Over the past decade, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources reports a significant decline in resident fishing and hunting license sales—down 215,569 for fishing and 91,263 for hunting. This drop threatens conservation funding, economic contributions, and the generational traditions that define us.

Looking westward, threats are even more dire: in Oregon, a ballot initiative collecting 10,000 signatures monthly is poised for next year's ballot, aiming to criminalize hunting, fishing, and most farming. Last year, a dozen states introduced legislation to ban forms of hunting, with radical proposals in Washington and New Mexico making it a crime to catch a fish or harvest game. If such measures can gain traction there, they can reach Ohio. We must be proactive—think about criminalizing the great American traditions of harvesting a deer or catching a fish to feed your family. That's why SJR 8 is essential: to protect these rights before they're eroded.

The movement to safeguard hunters' and anglers' rights has deep American roots, starting with Vermont in 1777. To date, 24 states have enshrined these protections in their constitutions, most recently Florida in November 2024, where nearly 7 million voters—67%—supported the amendment. This trend reflects citizens' commitment to preserving outdoor traditions from encroachment. Ohio has the opportunity to join them, ensuring future generations experience the thrill of a fishing line's pull or the sight of a white-tailed deer.

In closing, the right to hunt and fish is not merely a personal freedom; it is a cornerstone of Ohio's economy, family traditions, culture, food security, and conservation efforts. By passing Senate Joint Resolution 2, you will send a strong message that these rights will be forever protected in the Buckeye State. Thank you for your time and commitment to preserving Ohio's rich outdoor heritage. Together, let us advocate for the rights of sportsmen and women, ensuring our natural resources are respected, protected, and enjoyed by all. I am happy to answer any questions.