

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Joint Resolution 3.

My name is Ronald K. Vitez, and I live on a 240-acre farm in Dorset Ohio along with my wife Sherri. We are both lifelong residents of Ashtabula County and I have owned and operated a successful communications business in Ashtabula Ohio for 37 years. Along with this my family has been farming our property for over 70 years. A heritage that spans three generations.

I am also a standing board member of the board of directors for the Lakeview Credit Union, as well as a Dorset Township Trustee. Being an enduring farmer I adamantly support the Ohio Farm Bureau's position on the proposed Amendment, which is plain and concise: "The Ohio Farm Bureau supports a constitutional amendment that ensures the right to hunt, fish and harvest wild animals in the State of Ohio." As the leading organization supporting the rural citizens of this country, and this state, the Farm Bureau recognizes the right to hunt, fish and harvest wild animals as essential elements of Ohio's citizens.

I presume you have or will hear from ODNR wildlife specialists, insurance professionals and agricultural representatives regarding the need to manage game animals in Ohio. For example, 197,735 deer were harvested by deer hunters in Ohio in 2020. Without hunting that is, in round numbers, 200,000 deer damaging crops, causing property damage and injuries through deer/auto collisions, and eventually dying by disease and starvation due to over population. And, of course, taxes and fees paid by the sportsman support a substantial portion of the expense of managing this renewable resource.

But today I wish to testify about how hunting and fishing have been important in my life. As I said I grew up on a farm in Dorset Ohio, At that time if you did not live on a farm, a family member or a neighbor did and farm work was many a young person's first job. Hunting and fishing were part of growing up and wild game and produce from the farm were on our tables. Opening day of deer season was an excused absence from my high school. The deer check in station was a place to meet with neighbors to compare trophies and swap stories about the day's hunt. In Jan 2019 I lost my father. Time spent hunting and fishing with him, my uncles and even my mom, are some of my fondest memories. Over time,

society's spiritual connection to the land and nature has weakened and the comradery is lacking.

I have continued this self-sufficient lifestyle, one that my wife will gleefully admit I brought her into. Our freezers are filled with venison, turkey, rabbits and squirrels from our farm, bass from our pond, Lake Erie walleye and moose from a recent five-week trip to British Columbia. We can, freeze and process our garden bounty. We can relive the memories of time spent together outside over a meal. "These turkey nuggets I made are from the big gobbler you got on the last day of the season." I doubt a grocery store purchase ever generated such nostalgia.

As our state becomes more urban and less rural, as more people have no farm experience, as more people shun nature as a source of nutrition, it is easy to be concerned that our way of life is threatened. In 1998 I worked with many others to defeat Issue One that proposed to outlaw dove hunting in Ohio. Issue One failed as the voters of Ohio overwhelmingly recognized it as what it was: a foot in the door to begin dismantling Ohio's outdoor culture.

This proposed Constitutional Amendment will close the door on future attempts to restrict the rights of the minority who still hold these time-honored traditions dear. I sincerely hope this Amendment passes and with your help becomes part of Ohio's constitution.

In closing, Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Joint Resolution 3. I will now open the floor to any questions you may have.