



Proponent Testimony - Ohio House Bill 59 (Rep. Wiggam)

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Good afternoon, Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Cassie Kelly and I am with the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Ohio House Bill 59.

I first want to thank the bill sponsor Representative Wiggam and Senator Hackett, for your leadership in sponsoring and shepherding the companion bills and your effort to designate April as Ohio Native Plant Month. Recognition of our native plants is important for so much of the wildlife that depends on them, especially the monarch butterfly.

Last year, my mom and I planted a native habitat garden in my parents' backyard with the goal of giving monarch butterflies a fighting chance. You see, only 5 percent of monarch caterpillars make it to adulthood. Invasive species, disease, and habitat loss all impact this little critter and its ability to grow up. So, we planted about a hundred milkweed plants in our garden, which is the host plant for the monarch, and an Ohio native plant.

Milkweed has been largely ignored and treated as a weed, hence its name, and it wasn't until more recently that scientists and gardeners realized that it was critical to a healthy population of monarchs and that monarchs are vital pollinators that help promote a healthy ecosystem for all of us.

In fact, the milkweed plant has been falsely identified as a "noxious weed" and a threat to public health and many towns throughout Ohio have banned it from being planted. Toledo was one of those towns, and last year, the OEC Action Fund worked to have milkweed removed from the noxious weed list so that locals could legally use it in their landscaping again.

Just 30 miles from here where my mom and I planted our garden, in the middle of the suburbs, we really didn't know if it would matter. As the summer months passed by, we waited and waited, never spotting a single egg. And then one day, there he was. A bright green and yellow striped caterpillar, who looked like he was just about ready to cocoon.



As the experts suggest, we put him in a jar with a few milkweed leaves to munch on. We named him Milton (a clever play on Milkweed) which my dad thought was ridiculous. “He’s just a bug” he said. But 3 days later, Milton cocooned. And about a week after that, he emerged as a huge monarch, as big as my hand. None of us could believe it.

On the day we released Milton the Monarch, we took the jar outside and twisted off the lid. He sat inside the jar for a little while, trying to get his bearings, maybe a little afraid to venture on. Again, we were patient. When Milton finally decided to crawl out, he crawled right onto my dad’s hand, maybe as a gesture of thanks, and launched into his first flight. It was a moment so precious and so magical, we will never forget.

The thing is, we can learn from our mistakes and bring our native plants back so that pollinators like Milton have a fighting chance and this legislation to designate April as Ohio Native Plant Month does that. Nature is resilient and with your support of this bill, we can watch it be revived and flourish.

Chairman Hoagland, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 59. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.