

Harvey Webster Testimony (3 pages)

Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Craig, Members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee and Special Guests, thank you for having us here to testify today on behalf of Senate Bill 123.

My name is Harvey Webster and I am Chief Wildlife Officer and Museum Ambassador for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. I am a lifelong Ohioan, born and raised in the Cleveland area and was educated at Cornell University.

I've spent 45 years on the staff and in the service of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, most of that time promoting Ohio's rich natural heritage to people throughout the state. In 2016, I was awarded the Naturalist Award from the Ohio Biological Society, 'in recognition of exemplary service and dedication as a naturalist whose contributions have advanced our understanding and appreciation of Ohio's natural history.' And in 1999 I was awarded the Wildlife Conservation Award from the Ohio Division of Wildlife in recognition of our Museum's contributions to the recovery of Bald Eagles in Ohio.

I well remember the first time I saw the *Dunkleosteus terrelli* mount at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. I was 11 years old and visiting the Museum's Kirtland Hall of Prehistoric Life upon its opening in 1961. Just as Bree, I was in awe of this incredible creature, so formidable looking, so huge and so unlike anything I had seen before. I believe this is the first impression that most people have and they are astounded to learn that this amazing fish used to roam an ocean that once covered most of Ohio.

So imagine Ohio, 360 million years ago, covered by a shallow, tropical sea and located 800 miles south of the equator in the southern hemisphere. The bottom waters are without oxygen and the ocean floor is covered with black muds. Swimming above the oxygen less zones, the fish, sharks, sea scorpions as well as *Dunkleosteus terrelli* go about their daily business of trying to make a living - little fish eaten by bigger fish, which in turn are eaten by larger fish, which in turn are eaten by *Dunkleosteus terrelli*. Any fish that die and are not eaten, settle in the black muck and get buried. The lack of oxygen slows or prevents decomposition.

Over time the sediments get deeper and are lithified and the remains of the fish are entombed inside. This is how a fossil is made over long, long periods of time. Plate tectonics move the continents and as one plate grinds into another, it can uplift the land raising it out of the sea. Over long periods of geological time the Ohio shales are exposed and erode away, revealing the fossils trapped inside, to be discovered by Ohio paleontologists - Reverend Herman Herzer, Jay Terrell, Peter Bungart, Dr. David Dunkle and Dr. William Hlavin (who's with us today).

Long before the age of dinosaurs, *Dunkleosteus terrelli* was the largest living animal on earth. In the Late Devonian Era, 360 million years ago, it was the apex predator of a vast ocean world in the 'Age of the Fishes.' I feel like I should cue the music, because 'Dunk' (the nickname we gave him at the Museum) was the equivalent of the fierce Great White Shark, the Jaws of its era.

In the nearly 100 years since its founding, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History has worked hard to connect people with nature and science. We have provided exhibits and educational programs that have introduced people to the wonders of Ohio. Our scientists have worked hard to document and conserve our natural resources. We have worked side by side with the Ohio Division of Wildlife to conserve Bald Eagles in Ohio as well as endangered species like Peregrine Falcons, spotted turtles, and snowshoe hares.

All of the science, education and conservation done at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History is ultimately designed to connect Ohioans of all ages with Ohio's rich natural history and inspire them to seek out opportunities to further explore, discover and appreciate Ohio's amazing natural heritage.

In that same spirit, we believe *Dunkleosteus terrelli* to be an Ohio Icon. Indeed, it is an Icon that can inspire students and young people like Bree to become engaged in nature and science. And whether those students pursue STEM careers or just deepen their appreciation of their natural heritage as Ohioans, *Dunkleosteus terrelli* can inspire them.

We have a number of things that have achieved official State of Ohio status. Some are very well known, such as the Buckeye, our State Tree and the Cardinal, our State Bird. Some are lesser known, such as the State wildflower is the large

flowered Trillium, the State Mammal is the White-Tailed Deer, and the State Amphibian is the Spotted Salamander. What ties them all together, however, is that they are all relevant to the 'Ohio Story.'

Clearly, *Dunkleosteus terrelli* is uniquely Ohio with the first discoveries of these fossils being found just up from here along the Olentangy River between Columbus and Delaware. As discussed, these Ohio fossils are the world's best preserved and biggest specimens ever located. Scientifically speaking, it was these specimens collected from the black shales of Ohio that an international paleontologist used to describe and classify a new family (Dunkleosteidae), genus (Dunkleosteus) and species (terrelli) of fossil fish. In other words, these world class fossils define this amazing chapter of Ohio's prehistory.

Not only is *Dunkleosteus terrelli* world renowned and exhibited in Museums around the world, but 'Dunk' is also part of popular culture and has been featured on T.V. programs such as River Monsters and Animal Planet's Shark Week. It has an instantly recognizable and extraordinarily fearsome face. And in the words of the millions of kids just like Bree, (and once upon a time, Bill and me) *Dunkleosteus terrelli* is cool!

Accordingly, we hope that you will join us in supporting Senate Bill 123 that proposes that *Dunkleosteus terrelli* be added to the above list of Ohio Icons and be officially designated as Ohio's Fossil Fish. We feel it is well deserved and it's been a long time (360 million years) in coming.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.