

Testimony for the Ohio House of Representatives
Economic Development and Environment Committee
Given by
Brandon Smith, Vice President, Ohio Game Fishing LLC
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Thank you Chairman Collier, and members of the Economic Development and Environment Committee, for hearing my testimony today. My name is Brandon Smith and I am currently the Vice President of Ohio Game Fishing LLC, Ohio's largest and most active outdoors related website and message board in the state. I was formerly the president of the organization from April 2006 to April 2007 and one of the founding partners of the organization since our conception in April 2004. I grew up in the Cleveland area and currently reside in Columbus and have enjoyed fishing, hunting, boating, and swimming in Ohio's public waterways for the last 34 years. I frequent Lake Erie, as well as the many inland lakes and rivers all around our great state.

Ohio Game Fishing LLC, was formed by a group of avid outdoors enthusiasts 3 years ago, to give like minded Ohio sportsmen and women a free online resource to share information, fishing reports, and participate in outdoor related activities. Since our website went live in April 2004, we've grown extremely fast and continue to grow daily with an average of 15 new member registrations per day. Currently, our website averages over 150,000 visits each month and our visitors participate in almost 500,000 discussions on our message boards. Discussions on our website range from daily fishing reports to topics related to state and federal laws and how they impact Ohio sportsmen and women. Our bulk website traffic results in 15-20 million hits per month, which defines how many pages and pictures our visitors view in a 30 day period.

Offline, we facilitate various fishing tournaments, social events, and family oriented outings geared at promoting sport fishing in Ohio as well as introducing new anglers to the sport. This September is our 4th Annual Vermilion Hawg Fest on Lake Erie, an open walleye tournament geared towards introducing anglers to competitive fishing as well as catering to tournament veterans. I invite you all to visit www.ohiogamefishing.com to learn more about our organization, and our events such as the Vermilion Hawg Fest.

Last year, I started learning more about the problems Ohio has with sewage pollution through the Ohio Game Fishing website. Many of our members contribute to our website as an effort to educate, share information, and network with other Ohio fishermen. As the former president of the organization, I monitored the activity on the website regularly. One of our members posted questions and concerns about contaminated waters being discharged at the area where he was fishing. Subsequently the issue has evolved into a thought provoking discussion addressing the possibility of untreated wastewater being discharged into our waterways.

As an avid fisherman who frequents many of Ohio's waterways, it's extremely concerning to me that I have fished in waterways that are regularly polluted with untreated human waste. I imagine that this is not healthy for the waterways, or the fish,

but more importantly for me, my family, and the numerous other Ohioans that have come into contact with these waterways. As a leader in an organization of thousands of fisherman, I find myself in a difficult situation, left with inadequate information to provide to my organization about this problem. I understand that sewage pollution is not always threatening our waterways, however, it's difficult to educate and notify all of Ohio's fishermen and women when it does pose a health threat without accurate information. Without frightening our membership away from Ohio's waterways, I think that our members deserve the right to know when their health is potentially at risk, and how they can make educated decisions about choosing when and where to go fishing, boating, and swimming.

I am pleased to learn about the efforts that Representative Oelslager and the other co-sponsors of House Bill 235 are taking to protect me, my family, and Ohioans alike from the health threats of sewage pollution. I believe that this bill is a good way to help educate Ohioans about the problem of sewage pollution. With more educational signage about sewage overflows at their locations and other access points to rivers and lakes Ohioans will be made better aware of how we can protect our health from this pollution. By including educational materials in our sewer and water bills, and making this information more accessible on websites, I will have information to provide to members of my organization that are concerned about this issue. By making information available through the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, I can make a quick phone call to find out what waterways should be avoided on any week day.

I can only hope that my 5 year old son can enjoy a lifetime using our public waterways for recreation in the same way I have, and my father before me. I personally feel that being informed as to the status of our waterways cleanliness is the first step in ensuring that future generations of Ohio residents and visitors will have that same privilege.

I appreciate this Committee's efforts to help make our waterways cleaner, and give Ohioans the right to know when their health is at risk. I would again like to thank Representative Oelslager and the other members of the House of Representatives that have sponsored this legislation.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to address any questions.

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