

OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Testimony of Robert Harsanje and Gil Kollarik

To amend House Bill 473 into Senate Bill 209

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman Hottinger, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony requesting your support of amending House Bill 473 into Senate Bill 209. We would like to thank Senator Carey for his support in amending our bill into his legislation. We would also like to express how grateful we are for the significant bi-partisan sponsorship we have received for the original legislation.

This initiative will add to the significant good work that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife has been doing to provide hunting opportunities for physically impaired hunters. They have worked with sportsman's groups and organizations such as The National Wild Turkey Federation Wheelin' Sportsmen, The Physically Challenged Bowhunters of America, plus numerous volunteer helpers. Although specific numbers are very difficult to obtain, Mr. David Sullivan of the Buckmasters American Deer Federation estimates 1.7 million physically impaired hunters in the U.S. It seems quite reasonable to estimate Ohio's physically impaired hunter population up to several thousand in number – of which I am merely one.

I believe if I am asking for your support, you are entitled to know "why." Approximately a year and a half ago, Mr. Gil Kollarik and I were discussing my physical impairments that, in the beginning, prevented me from enjoying my lifelong love of hunting and the Great Outdoors. They also prevented me from participating in one of the above-mentioned ODNR co-sponsored hunts due to travel distance and other factors.

"How many more physically impaired hunters," we mused, "are in the same boat? People whose bodies have been afflicted by accident, acts of war or disease, yet they struggle and fight to regain as much normalcy as possible. People who love to hunt but

simply don't have the means to do it. There **has** to be a way to make more opportunities possible."

At that point, our conversation turned to a little "outside the box" thinking: Why don't we record our ideas of how to possibly build on the foundation the ODNR has built and request an appointment to talk with them?

We did, the concept was accepted and presented to Mr. John Daugherty, District Two Manager of the Division of Wildlife and other ODNR officials. Representative Ujvagi learned of it and volunteered involvement. Not long after Governor Strickland took office, the wheels of progress began to turn.

Gil and I were ecstatic. As word spread about the possible development of this bill, numbers of individual hunters, sportsman and hunting groups and organizations enthusiastically came forward, promising their support in any way possible.

So here we are today – at the cusp of rolling out an innovative program that will ignite hope and possibility within many, many physically impaired hunters and outdoors- persons who can be re-integrated back into the woods, the grasslands and waterways they love. And please know this, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Finance Committee – you will not find people more appreciative, more determined and more thankful for the opportunities they will enjoy. And also please know this – Mr. Kollarik and I both know and admire the determination and skills developed by people who are far more physically handicapped than I. Those with missing limbs, those who are partially or nearly totally paralyzed, those who are impaired in sundry manner, take very, very seriously their responsibility as physically impaired hunters. No matter whether they use a shotgun, compound bow or crossbow specially-outfitted to their wheelchairs, you will find them to be even MORE cautious, attentive and determined to take extra-special care and consideration before they fire a shotgun or release an arrow toward

their target. All good, educated and ethical hunters strive to ensure that they are absolutely certain of their skill level, position of the animal or bird, and what may lie beyond their field of vision so a clean, humane kill will result. Be assured that physically impaired hunters become determined to go the extra mile, take even greater focus and exert more self control because the shot they take may well be the only one for that year. But even that doesn't really matter – the foremost pleasure comes from time in the field with their friends, enjoying the many wonders and unique experiences nature offers. That's enough. Enjoying the bounty of a successful hunt is just icing.

I am humbly blessed and hugely fortunate. First, by the affliction of unforeseen and unwanted physical impairments that, for some reason, I have been chosen to fight and overcome. Though difficult to deal with at the onset, they ultimately did not teach me to hate or live in a destructive world of resentment and self pity. Instead, physical disabilities are teaching me the virtues of patience, perseverance, compassion, love and faith – no different from many, many others who have suffered far more loss than I.

Second, I have been most blessed and honored by the selfless, loving actions of Mr. Kollarik and another best friend, Mr. Aultie Gilliland, who have sacrificed huge amounts of their time and themselves to build a special, enclosed pole blind and a ground blind that I may easily access despite my inability to walk without mechanical aid over very short distances. They made it easy for me to continue to be just “one of the guys” again, a few guys who share a love for hunting, other hunters, the Great Outdoors -- and especially, each other.

Many, maybe **most** physically impaired people are not so fortunate. So then, Mr. Chairman and Finance Committee members, we humbly request your support of this legislation to open the door of opportunity for many of Ohio's physically impaired hunters -- SAFE hunters -- who do not seek sympathy or sorrow, merely a chance to

regain some of the normalcy they knew before their lives were unexpectedly and permanently changed.

Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the House Finance Committee for hearing my testimony. By supporting this important legislation you will not only provide excellent opportunities for many grateful physically impaired hunters, you will open doors to a small army of hunters, sportsmen and lovers of the outdoors who are waiting and willing to volunteer their time, themselves and their resources to build on the foundation of this exceptional, forward-thinking program that will make the Ohio Division of Natural Resources and Division of Wildlife proud for many years to come.

Thank you and may God bless.