

# Johnnie Candle

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## Professional Walleye Angler

March 15, 2023

Testimony Regarding HB 1538

Dear Senators, the following is my testimony regarding HB1538.

I want to start this testimony with my personal North Dakota story. In 1995 I was a very young tournament angler in my second year as a professional. That August I competed in a North American Walleye Anglers tournament on Lake Sakakawea. (The NAWA was a very large, national, professional tournament circuit at that time) To be honest, at that time in my life, I did not really know where North Dakota was and I certainly did not know how to spell Sakakawea.

To make a long story short, I moved to North Dakota less than one year later, became a resident, and have been here since. I have continued my path as a professional angler and was enshrined into the North Dakota Fishing Hall of Fame a few years ago. I have worked very closely with the State Game and Fish and Tourism Departments to better fisheries and attract visitors to the state. My guide service has brought visitors from all across the US and from several countries to North Dakota.

I have contributed to the economies of North Dakota for 27 years now through personal, business, and property taxes as well as improving the economics through tourism.

None of this would have happened if I did not gain exposure to North Dakota through the national level fishing tournaments that quit coming to North Dakota when the conservation fees for tournament became outrageous.

I am not alone in this scenario. I do not want to name drop as some may not want their names used in this testimony, but I can name at least 10 other past national tournament pros that moved to North Dakota because of the experiences they had while tournament fishing here. If the impacts made by those visits made 10 people and their families move to ND, how many did it effect enough to make continued visits or recommend those visits to their friends and families?

I could go on and on about the impacts these higher level tournaments have on economics, both state wide and locally. I could reiterate the data about how much media attention the state gains from these events. This is not necessary as I respect your intelligence and feel you understand all of that.

I testifies previously to the other aspects of HB 1538. Allowing an easier path for youth angling events is important. Allowing charitable organizations to keep more of their

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fundraising dollars is important. Saving administrative time and money is important. HB 1538 does all of this and more.

While the so called Conservation Fee is going away, my question is this; was it ever really a conservation fee? In my time here in North Dakota I have never seen the monies collected as a conservation fee used to create new habitat, establish new fisheries, or replace fish that were taken from a fishery by a tournament.

I have seen boat ramps maintained, fishing piers built, and fish cleaning stations established and maintained.

All of those resources are used by much more than tournament anglers. They are used by recreational anglers, duck hunters, water skiers, pontoon boats enjoying a picnic and many other use groups yet none of those groups are required to pay a conservation fee.

To take it a step further, groups can hold a water ski contest, jet ski races, duck hunting contest, big buck contest, long tail pheasant contest, coyote hunting contests, muskrat trapping contest and not need a permit or have to pay a conservation fee yet are all effecting the resources as much or more as a fishing tournament.

I urge you to pass HB 1538 as it rights a lot of wrongs and by admission of ND Game and Fish in many testimonies and media releases does not effect the amount of money used to maintain the facilities in question by enough to argue about.

Thank you for your time,

