



54TH DISTRICT
STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 30014
LANSING, MI 48909-7514
PHONE: (517) 373-1771
FAX: (517) 373-5797
E-MAIL: ronniepeterson@house.mi.gov

MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

RONNIE D. PETERSON

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Written Testimony in support of House Bill 4596
Submitted by State Representative Ronnie D. Peterson
To Chairman Mueller and the Michigan House Government Operations Committee
September 21, 2022

Thank you Chairman Mueller and members of the House Government Operations Committee for bringing HB 4596 up for a hearing today,

200 years ago, wild rice grew in almost every waterway in Michigan. Native American communities in the Great Lakes have been hand harvesting it for more than a thousand years. Now, it's mostly gone.

But efforts are being made to restore Michigan's wild rice beds, and I am here today to do what I can to bring more recognition to the grain known as Manoomin.

The bill before this committee today would designate Manoomin as Michigan's official native grain. I have been joined by 30 of my colleagues as co-sponsors of the bill and we are grateful to Chairman Mueller and the members of this committee for bringing it forward today.

Manoomin has tremendous cultural significance for Michigan's Native Peoples. According to the Michigan Sea Grant organization (a collaborative effort of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and the MSU Extension), Manoomin, "...is a species of grain-producing grass native to the Great Lakes area and portions of Canada. It grows in the shallow, quiet waters of inland lakes and slow-flowing streams. Once plentiful in places like northern Michigan, Manoomin populations have dwindled due to habitat loss, degraded water quality, and other factors.

"Manoomin is an important food source and cultural touchpoint for many Native Americans. The word 'Manoomin' translates to 'the good berry' in Ojibwe. Wherever possible, Ojibwe communities in Michigan have retained their connections to this important plant, and many continue to cultivate and harvest Manoomin each year."

Because this native grain plays such an important role in the lives of Michigan's indigenous people, I feel strongly that our state should pay tribute to Manoomin in the same way we

recognize the robin as our state bird, the white-tailed deer as our state game mammal and the painted turtle as our state reptile.

Please note -- this designation would not impose any restrictions on landowners. Just as one may still harvest an eastern white pine even though it is our official state tree --- Manoomin would not be afforded any special protection as our official native grain.

Please join me in helping to recognize Manoomin and its role in this state's history and ecology. The twelve federally recognized Native American tribes in Michigan have endorsed this bill through an official resolution of approval, and the Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan Corn Growers Association have taken a neutral position.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill. I welcome your questions.