



To: House Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee

From: Megan Tinsley, Water Policy Director, Michigan Environmental Council

Date: May 18, 2023

Re: Support of HB4159

Dear Chair Pohutsky, Vice Chairs Hill and Martin, and members of the Committee:

Pollinators—animals that move pollen from one plant to another while feeding—enable the production of fruits and seeds through plant fertilization. This not only provides food sources crucial to native wildlife; nearly one third of the food we eat requires pollination, including Michigan specialties such as cherries and apples. Most pollinators are flying insects such as bees, wasps and butterflies as well as flies and beetles. Globally, there is widespread documentation of pollinator population declines. In Michigan, bee populations have declined 61% in just 15 years. Because of the critical ecosystem services pollinators provide, we need a greater awareness of their plight to survive.

The adoption of a state butterfly would provide a tool to achieve greater awareness of pollinators and the critical role they play in Michigan's ecosystems and agricultural economy. One of only two states lacking a designated state butterfly, we are missing an opportunity to cultivate interest in and appreciation of Michigan's diverse natural environment. The black swallowtail butterfly is uniquely suited to fill the role of our state butterfly.

The swallowtail family of butterflies are larger and more easily observed than many smaller species, with unique "tails" that project off the hindwings. Found in both the Upper and Lower Peninsulas, black swallowtail butterflies lay their eggs on plants in the carrot family, including common herbs such as parsley and dill. Thus, the caterpillars can be enjoyed by Michigan residents in every corner of the state—from backyard, community and school gardens to urban balconies. The adults, boasting bright yellow spots on black wings, can be

observed on farms and in fields, parks and city gardens. A careful observer can even distinguish adult males from females. While some species of butterflies are migratory, black swallowtails overwinter in Michigan in the chrysalis form and thus can be considered year-round residents. Resembling a dried leaf delicately attached to the stalk of a plant, the chrysalis is a perfect example of camouflage for science teachers to share with their students.

Discovering the life cycle of a butterfly and its requirement at different stages of its development opens the door to a broader understanding of what wildlife need to survive. Like many other species of wildlife, pollinators are greatly impacted by habitat loss, growing populations of invasive non-native species, a changing climate and other threats such as pesticides and disease. Pollinators serve to benefit from practices that can be implemented by residents and communities alike: planting native plant species and reducing the use of chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides, which not only impact local species but also make their way into our watersheds.

We strongly support the adoption of the black swallowtail as the state butterfly to connect Michigan residents with the nature that makes our state special and to grow awareness of the importance of pollinators. As awareness grows, so can action to help restore declining pollinator populations.

Thank you for the consideration of these comments.

Megan Tinsley
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Michigan Environmental Council