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TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY  
COMMITTEE, RE: H-205

February 20, 2019

by Bill Mares, Burlington

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee. I am Bill Mares, a backyard beekeeper for 45 years, author of this book, and co-author with Ross Conrad and others of the forth-coming THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY. I have been president of the Vermont Beekeepers Association and the Eastern Apicultural Society. And I was a Member of this body from 1985 to 1991.

I applaud Rep. Troiano, and this committee for taking up the cause of honeybees and other pollinators. With 60+ co-sponsors this bill certainly struck an ecological nerve. The very title of my own book (BEES BESIEGED) captured some of the perilous state pollinators have fallen into, from threats of stress, monoculture, climate change, narrowed genetic pools, pesticides, pathogens, etc.

I want to address two related issues in this omnibus bill,--inspections and training/certification. Section 3023 mandates that all beekeepers in the State be "certified." When I began keeping bees, there was no certification at all. You could treat your bees with benign neglect, leaving them to their own devices and instincts. You worried about only one rare disease. America foulbrood. But now beekeeping requires much more attention.

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The fact is we at the Vermont Beekeepers Association already HAVE a voluntary certification program. Over ten years ago, Ross Conrad, former state inspector Steve Parise and I established the Certified Vermont Beekeeper program. In beekeeping classes taught around the state, we stress continually that beekeeping is serious business, even for hobbyists. I myself have taught a beginning beekeeping course to over 1,000 people in 20 years. Our mantra is: *If you don't want to care for bees, go get another hobby.*

Besides the huge expense of doing such testing, I fear a mandated program will have the unintended consequence of driving more beekeepers "underground, as it were. Even today, with a state law requiring registration we have outlaws who refuse to register their bees.

Plus, some of the biggest threats to good beekeeping are bad beekeepers nearby, who fail to keep their bees healthy, who are, as we say in the trade, BEEHAVERS, not BEEKEEPERS. There are no fences in beekeeping to make good beekeeping neighbors! Your diseased bees two miles away can afflict my bees.

What we really need is a strengthened inspection service, the better to keep Vermont bees healthy and to regulate bees being brought into the state.

If the AAFM has money to spend on regulation, this is where to put it.

Thank you.