



**State Representative
John Patterson**

House Bill 62
Sponsor Testimony
Agriculture and Rural Development Committee
May 10, 2017

Chairman Hill, Vice-Chair Koehler, and distinguished members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 62.

As you are all well aware, we must continue to find ways to protect and improve water quality in Ohio. While we have made significant strides in recent years, there is much more that can and should be done to ensure access to safe drinking water is a universal right for all Ohioans. With that in mind, my colleague Rep. Michael Sheehy and I developed the Ohio Water Quality Improvement Program.

HB 62 would require the Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture to develop, implement, and operate the program, in a manner consistent with the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Any land enrolled in the program would be exempt from property taxation. According to the USDA's website, CRP "is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality."

While CRP includes many commendable initiatives that, among others, aim to enhance wildlife habitat or provide better access to nutrition for pollinators, the program that we hope to establish through HB 62 would embody only the CRP initiatives that promote improved water quality. Perhaps some time in the future this body could pursue a program that promotes the other CRP initiatives, but at this time Rep. Sheehy and I are focused solely on the water quality aspects.

Recently, CRP hit its acreage cap, effectively prohibiting additional enrollment in the program. While leaders in Washington are debating whether to raise the acreage cap in the next federal farm bill, it is important that we take this opportunity to provide an incentive to Ohio farmers who wish take land out of agricultural production and plant species that improve water quality but who cannot manage the financial burden. As of right now few incentives exist in Ohio, and we believe

eliminating property taxes for the land enrolled in our program would serve as a worthy incentive that could greatly benefit the public.

To ensure that local schools are not harmed, HB 62 includes a provision that would require the state to reimburse any loss of revenue as a result of the program. This is a critical piece of our legislation that will protect local communities from potentially significant revenue loss.

The importance of protecting Ohio's public waterways cannot be overstated. We rely heavily on fresh water and must continue to find ways as a state to promote clean water in not only Lake Erie, but throughout the state. HB 62 has the potential to make a very real impact on Ohio water quality. I urge my colleagues on this esteemed committee to support our efforts.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be glad to answer any questions the committee may have.