



Michael P. Sheehy
State Representative

5-10-17

Chairman Hill, Vice-Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Patterson, and members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of House Bill 62.

HB 62 establishes the Ohio Water Quality Improvement Program, whereby a landowner can receive tax benefits by removing land from agricultural production and introducing new plant species to improve water quality. The bill will require that the Director of Agriculture adopt rules to govern the WQI Program that are consistent with the existing federal Conservation Reserve Program, including the plant species best suited to absorb nutrient runoff. It also allows for reimbursement of local taxing units for revenue lost due to land exemption to ensure that public school districts and community services are not adversely affected. Essentially, under the program, farmers will be incentivized to conserve environmentally sensitive agricultural land rather than use the property for farming or ranching.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the federal Conservation Reserve Program is the largest private-lands conservation program in the United States, contributing to environmental conservation nationwide through a variety of initiatives. In the state of Ohio, the Water Quality Improvement Program aims to build on the initiatives of the CRP focused on improving our water quality. Though it is not a complete solution, it creates a program aimed at reducing the levels of phosphorus and nitrogen running into our watershed, giving our agricultural partners the opportunity to use their land to help reduce pollutants without sacrificing farm profit. Rep. Patterson and I believe that the Water Quality Improvement Program is an essential next step in continuing the effort to improve the long term water quality in our state.

I urge the members of this committee to consider how much each and every one of us depend on having clean water every single day. The time is now for Ohio to take steps to ensure that we improve and maintain our water sources for the health of Ohioans now and long into the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We will happily answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M. P. Sheehy".

Michael P. Sheehy