

Ohio House Representative Michael Sheehy – House Bill 655 Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Hill, Vice Chair Koehler, and fellow members of the House Agriculture Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss House Bill 655, a proposal brought forward through discussions with farmers and environmentalists alike. It is an earnest attempt to uphold our part of an international agreement with our neighbors along the Lake under which we have agreed to a 40% reduction in nutrient loading by 2025.

This is not an optimistic goal, but a commitment to vigorously defend our most precious resource.

This legislation sets a simple limit on the amount of phosphorus that may be applied onto farmland at a rate that still allows for maximum crop production. Of course, reaching that limit will not be quite so simple. That's why we've included two years for farmers to catch up and make the appropriate investments and plan accordingly.

Through the "Toward a Clean Lake Erie Working Group," many of us in this room have heard testimony from experts and farmers talking about what we're already doing to keep excess nutrients on our farmland.

Unfortunately, this General Assembly has not yet had the opportunity to hear the other side of the story. Local governments have spent billions trying to keep up, sending the region into a crisis over scarce clean water resources. The cost to ensure clean water in population centers, not to mention the cost of getting it all the way out to our more rural townships, is unsustainable and still rising.

Local governments, however, have no control over the actions of any reckless actors that live upstream in the watershed. It is now time for the state to fulfill its responsibilities. It is time to begin an honest discussion of where we want to be a decade from now. I hope for the opportunity to answer questions you may have on House Bill 655, or the impact that this crisis is having on my community.