

Am. S. B. No. 2 Proponent Testimony
House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
May 16, 2017

Chairman Landis, Vice-Chairman Hagan, Ranking Member O'Brien and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I am Ronald Mills a family man, businessman, former Ohio Public Official and 27 year resident of the great State of Ohio. Over the last 42 years my career has focused on improving our country's environment, economy, and quality of life for all.

Senate Bill No. 2 as Amended identifies and will require implementation of a number of substantive objectives aimed at improving a broad range of environmental concerns involving restoration of surface water quality throughout the State, provision of access by all Ohioans to safe sources of drinking water, and the continuation and broadening of a tradition of sound solid waste management throughout our State. My testimony today will focus on measures contained in this bill that will significantly improve and protect water quality in Lake Erie as a valued natural resource to Ohioans for generations to come.

In 2015 Ohio's Governor, The Honorable John Kasich, undertook executive action in support of commitments made under the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. This was quickly followed by support from the Ohio Legislature through the adoption of requirements governing removal of dredge material from the lake, its eventual disposition, and resulting improvement in water quality within the lake. Embodied in these executive and legislative branch initiatives is the goal of beneficial use of dredge material to provide technically and environmentally sound methods for reducing nutrient levels in lake waters.

Removal and Beneficial Use of Lake Sediments

Under the guidance of Ohio EPA Director Craig Butler and his staff, progress has been made in achieving the objectives of the mandate to improve Lake Erie water quality. But the challenge remains quite significant in both scope and scale. In his testimony before this committee, Director Butler discussed the handling and removal of approximately 1.5 million cubic yards of dredge material per year from the Ohio lakefront and the enormous volume of equipment required to handle and transport such quantities.

Clearly, to meet this challenge will require an efficient and effective transportation plan based on sound logistics. To do so in a way that will facilitate the beneficial use of dredge material holds promise that it can be accomplished in a manner that will avoid an additional financial burden on the taxpayers and economy of Ohio. And to place such a system in operation will likely require

the coordinated efforts of both public and private sector entities incentivized to work together as partners toward a common objective, as has been one of the stated goals of Ohio's leadership since 2015. This effort would also likely benefit from the involvement of our State's Academic and Research community to identify solutions that are technically sound, sustainable, and practical from an application viewpoint. We are blessed in Ohio to have several such institutions that could contribute to design and development of reliable solutions along these lines.

Reducing Nutrient Loading into Lake Waters

As we know, the waters of Lake Erie suffer as a result of excessive nutrient loading, especially phosphorus, from tributaries carrying point source discharges and non-point source runoff into the lake. These nutrients play a major role in the development of harmful algal blooms that continue to compromise the capability of the lake to serve as a raw water source serving over 13 million people in communities all along its shoreline. Implementing a program relying on proven state-of-the-art technology grounded in a practical, realistic approach is critical to address this issue on a consistent and continuous basis.

Thirty-three counties, representing more than one third of all counties in the State, fall within the Ohio portion of the Lake Erie Watershed. Reducing phosphorus loading from point and non-point sources within this large geographic region present challenges related to deployment of control systems and their associated costs to public and private sources. Addressing this issue, without creating a costly public program providing funding to assist these sources, may in many instances involve public-private partnerships that access sources of private sector investment and for-profit facility operation. This type of approach could avoid the need for many communities to impose tax increases on their citizens to meet the mandate of phosphorus reduction in point source discharges within the Lake Erie Watershed.

Role of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission

Provisions in Am. SB 2 would strengthen, better define and broaden the role of The Ohio Lake Erie Commission in accomplishing the objectives just described. Thus empowered the Commission could play a pivotal role in developing local support for required initiatives to achieve improved water quality in Lake Erie. It could also serve a critical role in identifying and aligning objectives among various State Agencies with local communities, when needed.

Summary

To summarize, I want to emphasize the relative importance of the recovery and future protection of Lake Erie as a resource. At present, the employment of over 28,000 Ohioans is directly linked to the value of Lake Erie as a commercial waterway, a source of potable water to millions, a significant natural resource supporting a robust recreation and tourism industry, and a centerpiece for citizens seeking a high quality of life for themselves and their families. This

employment level accounts for approximately \$2.1 billion in annual income, most of which is expended within Ohio. Likewise about \$3.0 billion per year is generated by Ohio businesses who rely on the lake to support their operations and on-going investments. This regional economy, dependent on a healthy Lake Erie, accounts for approximately \$600 million per year in State of Ohio tax revenue.

Clearly, Lake Erie is a significant engine that helps drive the overall economy of Ohio. It must be restored and protected not only for the benefit of those who now live in, work in, and enjoy Ohio, but for the sake of future generations that have yet to experience its tremendous influence on providing quality of life and future economic security.

Before closing, I want to thank Senator Hite and his staff for their tireless effort in advancing this bill and in supporting the critically important objectives it embodies. Thanks are also due to staff of The Ohio EPA who have worked over the past year to convene meetings of stakeholders designed to gather information and perspectives from those Ohioans most closely involved with the issues.

Chairman Landis, I urge members of the Committee to support Amended S.B. 2.

I would be pleased to answer any questions Committee members may have.

Thank you.