

76th House District

- Southeastern Geauga County·
- Western Geauga County·
- Northern Portage County·



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Committees

- Rules and Reference·
- Finance·
- Community and Family Advancement·
- Insurance·
- Health·

Chairman Landis, Vice-Chair Hagan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 463, a companion bill to Senator Eklund's Senate Bill 228. The content of House Bill 463 was originally a budget amendment, requested by Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Districts, but was not ultimately included in the final version of House Bill 49. The language increases the municipal solid waste fee from \$0.25 per ton to \$0.50 per ton – effectively generating an additional \$3.25 million to Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Districts have historically been funded through a combination of local and state matched funding with a goal of a 1:1 match. Local governments have done their best to remain strong and provide funding to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts despite decreases in the local government fund. Unfortunately, state match funding has diminished over the years and districts have been unable to replace or add vital personnel during these critical times. Over the past 10 years, state match has dropped from a high of 98.5% to a low this year of 70.6%. This equates to a \$4 million dollar shortfall. The need for local technical expertise from Soil and Water Conservation Districts to landowners continues to increase while funding has steadily been decreasing. A state funding increase of about \$4 million would be necessary to get to the desired funding level of approximately \$14.5 million.

It is important to have the state match increase to the desired 1:1 ratio for multiple reasons. The loss of state support reduces the capabilities of addressing the resources needed throughout the counties which Soil and Water Conservation Districts represent. The loss of state support also produces a greater burden on local funding resources, which will lead to the further erosion of critically needed dollars, and it will harm Soil and Water Conservation Districts' education outreach

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to teach and train individuals on the importance of conservation practices. Practices that are necessary in order to sustain our economy and quality of living.

With Districts having non-mandated funding at the local level coupled with the loss of the Medicaid tax received by local governments, Districts are most vulnerable for being cut. A fee increase would be a great way to help restore funding and it would enable Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state to provide invaluable expertise and assistance to all Ohioans, which will go a long way to protecting our water quality and further enhance Ohio's economy.

Again, thank you Chairman Landis and members of the committee for taking the time to listen to sponsor testimony on House Bill 463. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.