



## COUNTY ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

FROM: Jeff Stauch, P.E., P.S., Union County Engineer  
TO: Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee  
DATE: April 5, 2017

RE: House Bill 49 – Opposition  
LOCCD2 Appointment of coroners and county engineers and mergers of the positions and offices.

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you in opposition today about LOCCD2 Appointment of Coroners and County Engineers and mergers of the positions and offices in HB 49.

My name is Jeff Stauch and I am the current Union County Engineer. Before becoming the county engineer in 2009, I worked as the Assistant Engineer for 8 years with responsibilities including: management of the Engineering Division of the County Engineer's Office, road and bridge design, construction plan preparation, contract project development, construction inspection, right-of-way negotiation and acquisition, specification development, access management, and development reviews.

The County Engineer is an elected official, serving terms of four years. We have ownership and operational responsibility for the local infrastructure, as defined in the Ohio Constitution and Ohio Revised Code. Those responsibilities are preparing construction plans, specifications and estimates for improvements to all county roads. The County Engineer also serves as engineering advisor to all townships in the county, assisting them with township road improvements and maintenance. The office inspects and maintains all bridges on township and county roads and maintains traffic signals on county roads that intersect other county or township roads.

The Engineer's Office oversees new commercial and residential construction projects in unincorporated areas for conformance to public street construction standards as well as grading and erosion control requirements. The office also inspects work done by utilities in the public road right-of-way to ensure the safety of the residents and motorists of Ohio's County.

Ohio law requires the County Engineer to be both a registered professional engineer and professional surveyor. In addition to the engineering responsibilities of the office, the County Engineer oversees the county Map Department which maintains the county tax maps, reviews surveys for property transfers and creates subdivision lot numbers and street addresses.

### **Opposition to LOCCD2**

Appointment of county engineers and mergers of the position and offices.

- 1. Changing the County Engineer position from elected to appointed will have a significant negative impact on services provided to other local official and the business community**

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**2. Proposal does not increase the possibility for more qualified professionals**

This proposal does not open up the pool of professionals to serve the public, as will probably be promoted. Any qualified professionals not willing to serve now would probably still not be willing to serve under this new proposal. If they are in the private sector, they are making more money, owning and running their own businesses. If the appointing authorities (commissioners) choose an individual who keeps their private business (again making the county engineer position Part-time and not full time), that business would not be able to work on any projects, engineering or surveying related, for the county or counties appointed in. Otherwise, that would be a conflict of interest. This would be a hardship on the business, and a hardship on the public by having another engineering or surveying firm not be able to be hired for service.

**3. Appointed County Engineer may not reside within the county that he/she is overseeing - therefore not know the needs of a county's road/bridge/drainage conditions**

A County Engineer from their own county knows every road, bridge, culvert, drainage system in their county. An appointed engineer will not know this from other counties and would take a long time for them to.

Typically, counties are around 500-550 square miles. By allowing multiple counties to "share" an engineer would double or triple the area needing to be served at probably no additional pay, for a profession that already pays better in the private sector than in the public arena. The public would not be better served when their part-time engineer is serving in another county.

**4. Elected position is a stable position; an appointed position would be in a continual state of flux.**

For stability, we are elected to a four-year term. The people have that time to decide if we are serving and protecting the public safety, health and welfare properly keeping our transportation system functioning. An appointed position is at the whim of the commissioners and could be eliminated at any time. All medium and long-range proposed and current design and construction projects would be in a continual state of flux.

**5. Appointed Engineer makes the position political**

As an appointed position, it actually takes the independent professionalism out of the office and makes the position politically appointed.

### **Final Thoughts**

#### Professional Engineer, Professional Surveyor

It is critical to the citizens of Ohio that the County Engineer holds both a professional engineering and surveying license due to the magnitude of the duties mandated to the office. Additional benefits of having County Engineer dually registered:

- Helps ensure that engineers elected as county engineers have the appropriate professional education and experience.
- Ohio Revised Code contains no less than *17 separate sections* relating to surveying, all duties for which a county agency must ultimately be responsible.
- Is a cost-saving measure for Ohio local governments by streamlining cost because of all the duties they are able to do.
- FHWA requires *documented* evaluation of scour conditions on all bridges in the nation. FHWA has granted Ohio county Engineers the ability to use a "Global Statement" in lieu of taking cross sections. This Global statement basically says that the Engineer can use their Professional Judgment to determine the channel scour risk based on the fact that they live in the county (required because of election), thus knowing the behavior of the streams in their county. **Ohio is the only state to be granted this exception. It was granted specifically because of the unique requirements of the County Engineer. (PE, PS, and must reside in county).**

We are responsible for 26,859 bridges and 29,088 miles of urban and rural roadways that are vital to the continued growth and prosperity of state. Although Ohio is ranked 35th in the nation by geographic size, it has the fourth largest interstate network that carries the fourth largest amount of truck traffic. The state is within a 600-mile drive of half of the nation's population and is considered a crossroad for America's manufacturing and agricultural industries.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.