



Ohio Environmental Council
[Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony - Ohio Senate Bill 299 (Senators Gardner & O'Brien)
Peter Bucher - Water Resources Director
June 26, 2018**

Good afternoon Chairman Ryan, Vice Chair Lipps, Ranking Member Cera and members of the committee. My name is Peter Bucher and I'm the Water Resources Director at the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 299 today.

Lake Erie is a source of drinking water for nearly 3 million Ohioans and an economic engine. Tourism alone is a \$40 billion plus industry in Ohio. More than a third of the revenue is generated by 8 counties along Lake Erie and supports more than 120,000 jobs. Unfortunately Lake Erie is reaching a tipping point due to algae and sedimentation.

Recently the Ohio EPA (OEPA) highlighted the severity of the algal bloom problem by designating the open waters of western Lake Erie impaired for algae in its most recent water quality report. Similarly, the OEPA published another report highlighting the severity of nutrient loading into the western Lake Erie basin watershed that ultimately fuels the harmful algal blooms. Simply put, this problem is not going away, and we cannot ignore it.

To put our waters back on track, we will need a well-funded plan that can reach the entire western Lake Erie basin watershed, and SB 299 is a step in that direction. The funds laid out in this legislation will assist with several key aspects of Ohio's algal bloom problem. The funding of research will help us further understand this issue. Funding for soil and water conservation districts to assist agricultural producers in developing nutrient management plans and funds for producers to implement best management plans will support efforts to reduce nutrient loadings into Lake Erie. The specification that the Soil and Water Phosphorus Program funds be targeted towards the "hot spot" watersheds will ensure the most return on the state's investment. This provision will allow the funding to be used in the areas that are identified as the highest contributors for nutrient loading.

SB 299 takes a well-rounded, short-term approach to providing further resources to fight harmful algal blooms. Much more will need to be done in the coming months to truly set Ohio on track to meet our phosphorus reduction goals and rid Lake Erie of its impairment status. We are hopeful SB 299 can be a building block for such action.

The Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund also is pleased to see an additional \$10 million allocated to the Healthy Lake Erie Initiative for the use of reusing sediments dredged from river mouths and harbors. We encourage the state to continue to use the funding and clean and safe sediments to improve water quality, as well as innovative ways to reuse the sediments which are environmentally sustainable.

We thank Senator Gardner, Senator O'Brien, Representative Arndt and Representative Patterson for their leadership on this issue, and introducing the Clean Lake 2020 plan. Chairman Ryan, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 299, and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.