



**OEC [ Action Fund ]**

**Proponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund  
HB 360 - Water Bottle Filling Stations in Schools  
Presented to the House Commerce & Labor Committee  
January 22, 2020**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and Members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on HB 360. My name is Melanie Houston, and I serve as the Drinking Water Director for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund (OECAF).

One of the most basic human needs is water. All of Ohio's children deserve access to clean, safe and affordable drinking water, yet we know we are not meeting this basic metric. Children in rural areas receive their drinking water from well-water or spring water (as I did growing up) which may or may not be tested for quality at all or often-enough. Children in urban areas are at risk of exposure to lead leaching from the 650,000 lead service lines still in place across the state. Voluntary testing by many schools has demonstrated the presence of lead. Children in low-income, urban and suburban households across the state are at risk of having water service cut off due to the rising cost of water rates. And of course, there are many other emerging contaminants such as PFAS, pharmaceuticals and micro-plastics which have been found in our drinking water.

HB 360 will help provide children with safe, clean drinking water through the provision of water bottle filling stations and drinking water fountains in new school facilities. Importantly, HB 360 adds to the definition of drinking water fountains and water bottle filling stations the dispensing of "filtered, clean drinking water."

The intent of this legislation is very clear - to provide ample access to drinking water in schools and to make certain that this water is as safe and clean as possible.

Given that there are no enforceable federal or state mandates for testing drinking water in schools or remediating lead hazards, the OEC Action Fund recommends that the legislation or accompanying rules for this legislation 1. further define what constitutes filtered, clean drinking water and 2. Require filters be certified for lead reduction, particulate reduction and to reduce aesthetic impurities (such as chlorine and odors). These devices must have a filter that meets the NSF 53 standard for lead reduction.

In our sister-state of Michigan, where they have focused on a “filter first approach” to lead reduction, drinking water stations with filters have been installed in public schools in Detroit, Flint, Royal Oak, Ann Arbor and Dearborn schools.

After installation, schools also will need a budget for maintenance costs, including replacement filters. According to the Ecology Center based out of Detroit, Michigan, filters cost around \$100 each and need to be replaced every year or as soon as the 3,000-gallon capacity is reached. Successfully implementing filtered water stations in a school requires ongoing support and maintenance, appropriate signage, culture and habit modification, and funding.

HB 360 is an important step toward ensuring clean, safe water in public schools. It will also have the added benefit of steering students toward better health and away from bottled water in single-use packaging. Bottled water use contributes to the problem of plastics in our rivers, lakes, and oceans. More than 22 million pounds of plastic pollution end up in the Great Lakes every year, according to the Rochester Institute of Technology. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, approximately 8 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean every year. That’s the weight of nearly 90 aircraft carriers.

Water is the basic building block for a healthy life. Every child should have access to clean, safe and affordable drinking water. HB360 is an important step toward a future where all of Ohio’s children have access to clean, safe and affordable drinking water.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer questions at this time.