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Senate Bill 2
House Energy & Natural Resources Committee
October 16, 2019
Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson and members of the Ohio House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 2.

Senate Bill 2 will establish a statewide watershed planning and management program that will be administered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The policy basis for the bill centers on the fact that there are numerous activities taking place across our state to improve water quality. There are many organizations who are working with local watershed professionals on watershed management issues like stream monitoring, using vegetation to prevent flooding, erosion control and many more.

S.B. 2 will help coordinate these efforts with a watershed planning and management coordinator who will be assigned to a watershed or a combination of watersheds based on their six digit hydrological unit code. The bill groups watersheds that are similar so there is commonality. Think of the watershed planning and management coordinators as a “quarterback” for the watershed, assisting soil and water conservation districts to identify sources and areas of water quality impairment, which includes loading of phosphorous, dissolved reactive phosphorous, and nitrogen. They can also work with local governments or other organizations that are addressing water quality issues and provide assistance to them.

There have been some very productive conversations over the last several months as state government—the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Governor—along with Ohio citizens, environmental groups, the agriculture industry, researchers and others collectively work to improve water quality and availability in Ohio. A perfect example of this is a unique collaboration of stakeholders representing agriculture, conservation, environmental, and research communities—including the Ohio Agribusiness Association, the Ohio Cattlemen’s Association, the Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association, the Ohio Dairy Producers Association, the Ohio Environmental Council, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Ohio Pork Council, the Ohio Poultry Association, the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association, the Ohio Soybean Council, the National Center for Water Quality Research at Heidelberg University and The Nature Conservancy, to name a few—that are working together to develop and deploy a statewide water quality initiative. Called the *Agriculture Conservation Working Group*, the collaboration brings together diverse interests to establish a baseline understanding of current on-farm conservation and nutrient management

efforts and to build farmer participation in a new certification program. This all-inclusive approach to inventory farm practices and build a farmer certification program is a positive step for furthering water quality actions. To that end, watershed planning and management coordinators will assist each SWCD in collecting data for the purposes of quantifying water quality and nutrient best management practices. That data then can be used to establish a baseline of the best management practices for nutrients that are being utilized in our state. This will help the Agricultural Conservation Working Group to further the goal of reducing nutrient run off through a later formed farmer certification program utilizing these best practices and data.

Additionally, watershed planning and management coordinators will help organizations and local governments develop and formulate nine-element plans or their equivalents. These nine-element plans can be developed for projects such as remedying stream flooding or other water quality needs and are mandatory for projects to receive federal funding.

Senate Bill 2 will help organize and provide assistance in our watersheds. It is one more useful tool in our tool box to help with water quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 2. We are happy to answer any questions that the committee may have at this time.