



OEC [Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
SB 2 - State Watershed Planning
Presented to the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
12-3-19**

Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on SB 2. My name is Peter Bucher and I'm the Water Resources Director for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund (OECAF).

Ohio is fortunate to have incredible natural resources from our Great Lake to the Ohio River with numerous lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams in between. These resources are the source of drinking water for millions of Ohioans and they are economic engines for our state. The tourism industry generates over \$40 billion in Ohio with a large portion of that being generated in and around our waterways supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. Unfortunately Ohio's waterways face threats every year like harmful algal blooms, erosion, point and nonpoint sources of pollution that put the public health and economies at risk.

For Lake Erie, the Ohio EPA (OEPA) highlighted the severity of the harmful algal bloom problem in 2018 by designating the open waters of western Lake Erie as impaired for algae in its most recent [water quality report](#). Additionally, the OEPA published another report breaking down [nutrient contributions](#) in major Ohio waterways highlighting how to address this problem throughout the state. Simply put, the harmful algal bloom problems and other threats to our waterways are not going away, and we cannot ignore them.

Senate Bill 2 could play a role in helping mobilize water quality improvement efforts in Ohio if paired with the funding sources like H2Ohiol. Ohio is in need of a statewide strategy to deal with water quality problems in smaller geographic areas. With numerous efforts going on to improve water quality in the public, private and nonprofit sectors coordination will be key to ensure funding and efforts are working as efficiently as possible.

Referenced in SB 2 are efforts that have occurred this year to create an agricultural conservation program that could play a key role in improving Ohio's water quality. This program is the [Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative](#) (OACI), there have been groups working on this project from the environmental, farm, academic, and regulatory

communities. In conjunction with state efforts, this initiative will work to assess how many agricultural best management practices are in place now and it will work directly with farmers to certify their water quality efforts and provide tools to do more.

In addition to these efforts, Ohio must consider all long term funding, voluntary, and legislative tools to sustainably improve our waterways and reduce harmful algal blooms, lead water lines, upgrade water infrastructure and ensure water affordability long-term. While SB 2 as currently written could better align water quality efforts we ask this committee to consider additional measure to be included to make this bill an all encompassing water improvement bill from source to tap.

Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today. We look forward to working with you during the upcoming weeks to ensure this bill helps build a statewide plan to protect Ohio's drinking water and preserves Ohio's natural treasures for future generations. I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.