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**Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE)
House Bill 62 – Interested Party Testimony
House Finance – February 28, 2019
(Written Only)**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 62, the biennial transportation budget. Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality (NOBLE) is a coalition of individuals and organizations advocating on behalf of consumers of State Health and Human Services programs. We are low-income citizens who are most impacted by budget decisions and reductions at the State, Local and Federal levels. NOBLE is also a member of the coalition MOVE Ohio, comprised of more than 40 organizations, diverse both organizationally and geographically, representing the interests of transit riders across the state, including organizations representing older adults, those with disabilities, historically disadvantaged communities, environmental advocates, riders of public transit, transit union workers, pedestrians and bicyclists. At NOBLE we believe that people should have access to essential support services in their communities including transportation. We are encouraged by the fact that Governor DeWine has proposed an increase in the gas tax as a revenue option for our states roads and bridges, however we would ask the legislature to find and provide additional adequate and sustainable funding sources for our states public transit system.

NOBLE recognizes that Ohio's 61 public transit systems have been in crisis for decades due to underinvestment at the state level. Continuous underfunding of public transportation has had negative consequences especially on low income Ohioans. One consequence is that it has created limitations in a worker's ability to reach a diversity of jobs with sustainable wages. This in turn affects the workers ability to support themselves and their families. It also leaves too many people with disabilities and those who are aging essentially homebound, making it difficult for them to access the grocery store, doctor's office, and to meet their other needs with dignity.

In order to reverse this crisis, the state needs to adequately invest in public transportation beginning in the upcoming budget cycle. NOBLE recommends at least \$180 million in dedicated revenues be set aside annually into a Transportation Choice fund. The Ohio Department of Public Transportation, as part of its 2015 Transit Needs Study, recommended the State of Ohio fund public transportation at \$120 million annually, starting in FY2015. By FY2025, the study recommended increasing the amount to \$185 million. Since we are approaching FY2020 and FY2021, we recommend funding levels at the total amount of \$150 million for public transit. We also need to invest in safe pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure. We recommend an additional \$30 million in transportation funds be set aside for these purposes.

In HB 62 there is a proposal to raise the gas tax by 18 cents; unfortunately for low income people this will be detrimental. The gas tax is a flat consumption tax and is regressive in nature, thus it impacts the earnings of low-income Ohioans more heavily than the rich. We believe that if the proposed gas tax goes into effect, there should be efforts made to mitigate potential harm on the most vulnerable populations. One solution would be to set aside 20 percent of the revenue generated from the gas tax increase for the Transportation Choice fund mentioned above. Another solution is to expand the state Earned Income Tax Credit, by making it refundable and removing any caps.

At NOBLE we understand the importance not only of investing in public transportation, but the importance of raising the revenues needed for this endeavor. Thus, gas tax revenues could be one way to fund public transportation; other potential revenue generators include closing tax breaks in Ohio's \$9 billion tax expenditure budget, or from flexing federal transportation funds. Whichever option the legislature chooses, it is important to remember that Ohio is stronger when transportation is affordable and accessible. Investing in public transit and reducing disproportionate impacts of potential tax increases on low income families will create more quality, livable communities and attract economic growth and development.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 62.

Sincerely,
Diana King
Chair, NOBLE