



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

Proponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund HB 7 - H2Ohio Endowment Trust Fund Presented to the House Finance Committee May 23, 2019

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on HB 7. 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, and numerous lakes, ponds, rivers, and stream 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, and point and nonpoint sources of pollution, putting 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, 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 and 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. We cannot ignore them.

HB 7 and the other H2Ohio proposals signify the need to invest in protecting Ohioans and our waterways long term. The water quality improvement needs are real; the investment is overdue. This fund will be an incredible success if it is part of the long term solution to restoring wetlands, increasing agricultural conservation, addressing leaking septic systems, replacing lead water lines and even upgrading aging infrastructure. However, any large amount of funding, such as this endowment fund, needs to have strong accountability measures in place to ensure public investment is well spent and, in this case, that we see water quality improvements. We believe the H2Ohio Advisory Council model is one good option to achieve an accountability framework.

Through things like the [U.S. Action Plan for Lake Erie](#), Ohio has committed to agricultural conservation on a voluntary basis. Ohio will not achieve our goal of 40% reduction in phosphorus entering the lake by 2025 without substantial state funding from



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the proposals being considered this year. Ohio needs to fund and implement a statewide conservation plan to keep nutrients and pollutants out of our waterways for all Ohioans that drink from, recreate on, and make a living due to our incredible natural resources.

Chairman Oelslager and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on HB 7. I'd be happy to answer questions at this time if there are any.