

House Finance Committee
Interested Party Written Testimony
House Bill 670

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The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
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Thank you Co-chairs Oelslager and Callender, Vice-Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony as an interested party on House Bill 476, the capital reappropriations bill.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization with chapters in all 50 states and projects in over 70 countries. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters and we own and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state. We are a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

We are pleased to see the House continuing to move Ohio forward during these unprecedented times. The re-appropriations in this bill will advance projects across the state that stimulate local economies and provide Ohioans with improved facilities to utilize and enjoy. We appreciate the bill's inclusion of reappropriations to the Clean Ohio Conservation fund at approximately \$101 million. This money benefits Ohioans across the state and is critically important as many Ohioans reconnect with nature and engage in outdoor recreation during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the bill's sponsor, Representative Merrin, and others have noted, capital reappropriations are necessary to recommit funds that have already been committed to an approved project by a previous General Assembly. By confirming the 133rd General Assembly's commitment to previous Clean Ohio Conservation appropriations, this bill sends an important message to Ohioans about the importance of nature and the state's commitment to a cleaner, greener Ohio.

We also encourage the General Assembly to additionally reappropriate the funds that have been previously committed to conservation and outdoor recreation, including \$25 million for the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement fund and \$1.1 million for the Clean Ohio Trail fund, as well as previously approved projects for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. As Ohio Office of Budget and Management Director Murnieks noted in her testimony on capital reappropriations before the Senate Finance Committee, the associated debt service for these projects has already been accounted for in the state's budget. The cost savings associated with not reappropriating funding to these projects is minimal when compared to the benefits to be realized by the additional stimulus in local communities and the benefits of the projects themselves.

We understand that this bill is a starting point for discussions in the House on reappropriations as the state faces budget challenges and recognize that there is much to celebrate in House Bill 670. We thank you again for your support of reappropriations for Clean Ohio Conservation projects and urge your support for our recommendations to fully reappropriate all Clean Ohio funds as well as those for ODNR projects. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 670.