



Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

**Testimony on House Bill 166 (Budget)
Before the House Finance Subcommittee:
Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources
Bob Short
April 9, 2019**

Chairman Hoops, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the committee, on behalf of the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166.

My name is Bob Short, and I am the President of the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. I know many of you have great relationships with Soil and Water Districts in your communities. Our 88 county SWCD's pride themselves on being "boots on the ground" to get essential conservation work accomplished. Each district is diverse and is "locally-led," which means each district serves to address the vast array of conservation, agriculture, natural resources and environmentally-based issues focused on the needs to the communities each district represents. SWCDs operate critically needed programs centered around soil health and water quality and rely on non-mandated funding allocated at the local and state level.

Ohio's SWCDs consist of 440 locally elected, uncompensated board members who employ over 500 people statewide. We work "one-on-one" with farmers and communities to survey and design environmentally responsible projects such as surface and subsurface drainage and livestock waste management facilities, and provide resources for stormwater assistance, among others; We work collaboratively with partners to deliver technical assistance, financial support and valuable conservation programs to land owners; and, We engage and educate the public about natural resources issues through special programs, workshops, events and academic experiences.

Ohio SWCDs have been funded through a combination of local and state match funding with a goal of 1:1 match. Local governments have, for the most part, tried to remain strong and provide some funding to the SWCDs despite decreases in the local government fund. The state match comes from four different places: General Revenue Funds, a fee on Construction and Demolition Debris, a fee on Solid Waste and a Scrap Tire Fee.

In the last budget cycle, state funding hit a record low of 70%. With the passage of Senate Bill 299, additional funds were allocated to counties in the Western Lake Erie Basin for practices and implementation. In the proposed Executive Budget those funds have remained, with an additional \$5 million in GRF which would bring us very close to a 1:1 match. It is important to note, that while specific areas in the state are on the forefront of our minds, SWCD's do necessary work throughout Ohio and need



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the resources to implement conservation practices. As we have often heard, “an ounce of prevention, is worth a pound of cure.”

The Federation is also engaged in discussions on Governor DeWine’s H2Ohio proposal. We are hopeful this funding will allow us to engage farmers, landowners, and local communities in putting a variety of conservation practices in place that will provide lasting solutions for water quality issues around the state.

On behalf of the 88 Soil and Water Districts, I want to thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.