



Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 50
Before the Senate Finance Committee
Carmella Shale, Geauga County Soil and Water Conservation District
April 2, 2019**

Chairman Dolan, Vice-chair Burke and Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance 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 Senate Bill 50. We also wish to thank Senator Eklund for his work in bringing this bill to the Senate.

My name is Carmella Shale, and I am the Director and Engineer of the Geauga County Soil and Water Conservation District and have been for the past 20 years. Ohio's 88 SWCDs consist of 440 locally elected, uncompensated board members who employ 500+ people statewide that are dedicated to the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil and water resources. 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, rely on non-mandated funding allocated at the local and state level, and also serve as the delivery system for nearly 70% of the federal Farm Bill programs.

Ohio's water quality efforts have clearly been one of the highest priorities shared by the Governor, Legislature, and various organizations focused on the environment, agriculture, tourism, and sportsmen. Ohio SWCDs represent an on the ground presence within each county to address impacts on its soil and water resources. At the county level, SWCDs are able to work one-on-one with landowners, contractors, and developers to tailor recommended conservation practices designed to improve water quality and soil health while fostering a healthy economy in addition to coordinating with government agencies on all levels. Districts remain diverse within Ohio by adapting to current issues and regulations. Assistance is provided to protect soil and water quality as it relates to agriculture as well as erosion and storm water quality due to development and construction and all other land uses in between. SWCDs are locally led and are technically equipped to address water quality issues and meet the demands for clean water with our growing population and ever-changing land uses. Districts also provide many educational programs and initiatives to the public to educate on the many ways to reduce pollutants and storm water runoff in all facets of land use. Becoming an educated land user enables one to be a better land steward.



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Ohio SWCDs have been historically 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. Unfortunately, state match funding has diminished over the years and Districts have been unable to replace or add vital personnel during these critical times. Over the past 10+ years state match has dropped from a high of 98.5% to a low this past year of 67.1% equating to an over \$4 million dollar shortfall. The need for local technical expertise from SWCDs to landowners continues to increase with Ohio's rising population and growing demand on our land and water resources while funding has steadily been decreasing.

Why is it important to increase the State Match to be closer to the 1:1 goal? Because the loss of state support reduces the capabilities of addressing the resource needs throughout the counties the SWCDs represent. It produces a greater burden on the local funding resources, which can lead to the further erosion of critically needed dollars to address the resources challenges and/or issues. In the end, it means less local "one-on-one" meetings with farmers, producers, developers and more in an effort to implement the needed management practices that keep our soils productive, our waters clean and our economy thriving. It also impacts our educational outreach -- to teach and train the importance of conservation practices and why these are needed to sustain our economy and quality of living. Less resources are required to keep our water clean and soil productive through better management and education rather than reacting when there is a problem.

SB 50 would greatly aid the districts by adding approximately \$3.25 million by increasing the Municipal Solid Waste tipping fee by \$0.25. While some adjustments have been made to funding at the district level, those dollars have been attached to specific activities and specific areas. This funding model would follow the existing state match funding formula that distributes funds equitably to all 88 SWCDs for basic operating purposes. With Ohio's total tons of generated solid waste per capita of 2.71 tons/year this would equate to a total cost of \$0.68/year per capita.

This year the Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District, along with many other Districts are celebrating our 75th year of providing locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns both in the rural and urban settings in their respective counties in various capacities. Formed in the aftermath of our Nation's catastrophic Dust Bowl, SWCDs remain the local go-to agencies and conservation leaders of our communities. We have stood the test of time and have proven our ability to remain efficient, effective, and adaptable to Ohio's ever changing landscapes and challenging issues as this great state continues to grow. Securing this funding mechanism can only help secure Ohio's resources and future.

Thank you for your consideration and allowing me to provide this testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.