



**State Representatives
John Patterson & Haraz Ghanbari**

House Bill 189
Sponsor Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
October 22, 2019

Testimony (continued....)

As you have already heard from our colleague, House Bill 7 seeks to protect and preserve our most precious natural resource—water found in our lakes, rivers, and streams. Rep. Ghanbari has outlined the concept behind the H2Ohio initiative which will be modeled after, in part, our very successful OPERS model; the H2Ohio Advisory Council, which will establish priorities for use of the fund for water quality initiatives; and requires the Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA) to act as trustee of the H2Ohio Trust Fund and grants the OWDA full power to invest fund money. HB 7 designates the Treasurer of State or the Treasurer’s designee as the Executive Director of the fund, and requires the Treasurer to aid in coordination efforts between the OWDA, the H2Ohio Advisory Council. Funds can be dispersed as grants or loans, for purchases for the development and implementation of projects and programs, for data gathering and monitoring, and other policies and priorities designed to address water quality. In sum, the cycle is complete: a special fund outside the state treasury, administered by special council, and grown by a special board. At every turn, this initiative is special.

And why is this so?

In the entire U.S., I am not aware of any program such as H2Ohio. Bold in its concepts, grand in its design, and visionary in its mission, it is absolutely imperative that we move HB 7 forward to address the pressing issues of water quality from Ohio’s Great Lake to Ohio’s great river. Water quality is important to our lakes, our many rivers, our streams, and even our ponds.

In full disclosure, the 99th District is the only district in Ohio with TWO deepwater ports on Lake Erie—Conneaut and Ashtabula—let alone the Geneva State Park Marina and a handful of private marinas. The largest public lake in Ohio, Pymatuning, is found, in part, in the 99th District. The largest private lake in Ohio, Roaming Shores, is also found in Ashtabula County. Then, too, Ashtabula County is home to FOUR scenic rivers in the Grand and Ashtabula Rivers, and the Conneaut and Pymatuning Creeks. Parts of the Grand and Ashtabula are also wild as is most of

the Pymatuning Creek. No other county in Ohio comes close to this--in fact, only one county in Oregon has four such rivers while one parish in Louisiana contains seven—in essence Ashtabula County is tied for second in the nation for the most scenic rivers (according to LSC) but we are the ONLY county with that many scenic rivers that is also positioned on a Continental Divide (according to the U.S. Geological Survey). We are clearly proud of the fact that we are home to a Great Lake, a Grand River, and other essential estuaries. Clearly, water quality is important to us for many reasons.

For Ashtabula County's economy alone, tourism generates over \$450 million dollars each year. Our wineries, our metroparks, our covered bridges—the most in any Ohio county including the longest and the shortest in the United States—all share one common thread—water. Water through, around, near, or by—but water is the common denominator. Further, a single launch of a boat out of Conneaut bears forth an economic bounty of approximately \$70 in food, gas, bait, and fishing supplies—let alone lodging. Further, in Ashtabula and Conneaut there are kayak rentals available for those who might be interested in exploring the harbors by water.

Second, fishing on Lake Erie is big business. Who doesn't like Lake Erie perch or walleye—and steelhead? Steelhead Alley is found along Lake Erie and the center of this great region is, you guessed it, Ashtabula County with the Conneaut Creek and Ashtabula River being prime fishing estuaries for these great fish. Truth be told, Japanese businessmen fly into our airport simply to fish for steelhead.

As far as perch goes, my perch fishermen came upon hard times this past summer. Catches were small—if at all. ODNR was invited to participate in a “perch summit” this past December. In addition to plentiful walleyes feeding on perch and cormorants with full stomachs too, there appeared on a slide a satellite shot of Lake Erie taken in mid-August showing an enormous zone of oxygen--depleted water off the coast of Ashtabula and Conneaut—where perch are normally caught. This phenomenon was created by the littoral drift of oxygen--depleted water from the western basin of the lake to the eastern end—depleted due to the decomposition of algae.

Third, business and industry require ample amounts of clean water—or water that requires rudimentary “cleansing” for such purposes. It is critically important to keep the costs of conditioning water at a minimum to allow our business and industries to compete in a global economy.

Finally, and most importantly, millions of person along BOTH sides of Lake Erie depend upon our great lake for their drinking water. One word should send a chill down our collective spines when the unthinkable becomes reality—Toledo. To think that a major first world city, in 2014, was forced to hand out bottled water for its citizens to drink is not only embarrassing, but deeply troubling.

But algal blooms are not just confined to Lake Erie. Amazingly, for our river counties, I specifically recall the nearly 700 mile long algal bloom on the Ohio River in September 2015. What's more, for those who reside in central Ohio, lest it be thought that this part of Ohio has not been impacted, in late June/early July 2016, a warning was put out for pregnant women in the Scioto watershed, (Columbus in particular), to avoid drinking water due to elevated levels of

nitrates as a result of fertilizer application coupled with intense rains. Three straight years of water quality issues have been experienced: on Lake Erie, on the Ohio River, and in the Scioto valley—and here we are in October, 2019.

Let me be clear, HB 7 is but a small step, but an important one, to address the challenge of water quality across our state that affect us all. The problem will not be solved in the life of this General Assembly nor even in the life of this administration. Legacy phosphorous does not simply disappear. This is precisely why the H2Ohio Program will be permanent—not just a ten year endeavor, but one that will require ongoing effort. Remember, it was 50 years ago that the Cuyahoga River caught fire. Today, fishermen not only catch fish in the river, but they can eat them. Let us take the first steps, with the passage of HB 7, to address the problem of water quality for all of Ohio. And may they, 50 years from now, look back with great appreciation for the work we did today.

I thank you for your time and welcome any questions you might have at this time.