

Senate Bill 2 Proponent Testimony
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
February 22nd, 2016

Chairman Balderson, Vice-Chairman Jordan and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee I am Ronald Mills, a businessman and a 27 year resident of Ohio. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on this critically important legislation. Thank you Senator Hite for your sponsorship of Senate Bill 2 and your recent work to improve the bill. My testimony will focus on the benefits of the bill to improving water quality and management of Lake Erie as both a prized national asset and a vital natural resource to our State.

Anyone who resides, earns a living, vacations, conducts business, and/or enjoys outdoor recreational activity in Ohio understands the importance of Lake Erie. Our economy and infrastructure rely on the lake to sustain us and provide opportunities for future growth. It allows Ohio a direct conduit to the rest of the world for the import and export of commercial goods and products. It also provides an invaluable resource in the form of plentiful fresh water needed for industrial, commercial and municipal use as both process and potable drinking water. Millions of Ohioans rely and depend on Lake Erie as a resource necessary to maintain our quality of life.

As described in the bill, explicit support and clear direction for the Ohio Lake Erie Commission is crucial to fulfilling its mission of protecting the lake and leading efforts for Ohio to meet its commitments under the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The mandate to protect Lake Erie, as described in this Agreement, is not only challenging in scope and application of technical solutions but will also require the committed cooperation of public and private organizations. Providing the Lake Erie Commission clarity and support will significantly aid in its efforts to achieve this goal and better focus its resources on developing consensus, specific direction and cooperation among these public and private stakeholders.

As we are all too aware, the waters of Lake Erie suffer as a result of excessive nutrient loading, particularly phosphorus, from its tributaries as well as point sources discharging directly into lake waters. These nutrients play a major role in the development of harmful algal blooms that have and will continue to compromise the capability of the lake to serve as a raw water source serving waterfront communities all along its southern shore. Implementing a comprehensive program relying on proven state-of-the-art technology grounded in a practical, realistic approach is therefore critical to successfully addressing this issue on a consistent and continuous basis. No less than thirty-three counties, representing more than one third of all counties in the State, fall within the Ohio portion of the Lake Erie watershed. Reducing phosphorus loading from both point and non-point sources throughout this large geographic region present challenges related to both deployment of control technologies and their accompanying cost to public and private sources. Addressing this issue, without creating a costly public program providing funding to assist these sources, may in many instances involve public-private partnerships that access sources of private sector investment and for-profit facility operation. Such an approach could

avoid the need for many communities to impose tax increases on their citizens to meet the mandate of phosphorus reduction in point source effluent discharges within the Lake Erie watershed.

Another major factor in reducing the impact of nutrients that have entered the lake is to identify a long-term, workable, practical, and cost-effective solution for the management of dredged lake sediments that are currently placed into the open lake for disposal. Such a solution must incorporate a system that will efficiently and effectively move 1.5 million cubic yards of dredged material every year away from the lake for upland placement. Director Butler, in his testimony before this committee, used the illustration of 114,750 dump trucks stretching for 625 miles from Columbus to Boston to move the material dredged only from Toledo Harbor every year. Clearly, to move the 1.5 million cubic yards of material dredged from all Ohio lakefront ports per year will require a highly efficient and effective transportation system. To put into place such a system will require the coordinated efforts of both the private and public sectors to meet a logistical challenge of this magnitude.

Likewise, a workable remedy on a scale necessary to meet the need applies to the goal of beneficial use of dredge material. A 'piecemeal' method of achieving beneficial use will in all likelihood not be sustainable nor economically feasible given the magnitude and scope of the issue. A successful approach to beneficial use must be comprehensive in scope and require the involvement of public and private sector organizations who are committed and incentivized to meet the goal. This effort may also benefit from the involvement of Ohio's academic and research community to identify solutions that are technically sound, sustainable, and practical from an application viewpoint. We are blessed in Ohio with several such institutions that could significantly contribute to development of a reliable solution.

Finally, I want to emphasize the relative importance of a comprehensive solution to the recovery and future protection of Lake Erie as a crucial resource for all Ohioans and beyond. At present, the employment of over 28,000 people is directly linked to the value of Lake Erie as a commercial waterway, a source of potable water to millions, a significant natural resource supporting a robust recreation and tourism industry, and a centerpiece for citizens seeking a high quality of life for themselves and their families. This employment level accounts for approximately \$2.1 billion per year in personal income, most of which is expended within Ohio. Likewise, about \$3.0 billion per year is generated by Ohio businesses who rely on the lake to support their continued operations and on-going investments. This regional economy, dependent on a healthy and vibrant Lake Erie, accounts for almost \$600 million in annual tax revenue.

Clearly, Lake Erie is a significant engine that helps drive the overall economy of Ohio. It must be protected not only for the benefit of all those who now live, work and enjoy Ohio but also for the sake of future generations that have yet to experience its tremendous influence on maintaining quality of life and future economic security.

I urge you, members of the Committee, to support Senate Bill 2 and thank you for this opportunity to provide proponent testimony.