



COUNTY ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

FROM: Dean Ringle, P.E., P.S., Franklin County Engineer
TO: Senate Finance: General Government & Agency Review Sub. Committee
DATE: May 23, 2017
RE: Sub. House Bill 49 – Interested Party
LOCCD2 Appointment of coroners and county engineers and mergers of the positions and offices.

Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair O'Brien, and members of Senate Finance: General Government & Agency Review Sub. Committee, thank you for the opportunity to permit me to speak in favor today on the Ohio House of Representatives decision to remove the Governor's proposal to appointment of Coroners and County Engineers. **The County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) supports the House passed version of HB 49 that retains County Engineers as an independent locally elected office.**

My name is Dean Ringle and I am the current Franklin County Engineer. I have been with the Franklin County Engineer's Office for more than 36 years, with the last 17 years serving as the Franklin County Engineer. As of July 1, I will be retiring from my elected position to begin as the County Engineers Association of Ohio's new Executive Director. Throughout my career at the engineer's office, I have held positions in construction, surveying, and overall engineering and surveying management. Over the past 24 years I have also taught engineering and surveying students at The Ohio State University in the legal aspects of surveying and land subdivision design courses.

The County Engineer is an elected official, serving terms of four years. We have ownership and operational responsibility for the local infrastructure, as defined in the Ohio Constitution and Ohio Revised Code. Those responsibilities are preparing construction plans, specifications and estimates for improvements to all county roads. The County Engineer also serves as engineering and surveying advisor to all townships in the county, assisting them with township road improvements and maintenance. The office inspects and maintains all bridges on township and county roads and maintains traffic signals on county roads that intersect other county or township roads.

The Engineer's Office oversees new commercial and residential construction projects in unincorporated areas for conformance to public street construction standards as well as grading and erosion control requirements. The office also inspects work done by utilities in the public road right-of-way to ensure the safety of the residents and motorists of Ohio's Counties.

Ohio law requires the County Engineer to be both a registered professional engineer and professional surveyor. In addition to the engineering responsibilities of the office, the County Engineer oversees the county Map Department which maintains the property boundary information for the county tax maps, reviews surveys for property transfers and creates subdivision lot numbers and street addresses.

Additionally, County Engineers, as the County Surveyors, perpetuate and reestablish original land corners and perform multiple surveying duties as set forth in Ohio law.

Why CEAO Opposed LOCCD2

Appointment of county engineers and mergers of the position and offices.

1. Proposal does not increase the possibility for more qualified professionals

This proposal does not open up the pool of professionals to serve the public. Any qualified professionals not willing to serve now would probably still not be willing to serve under this new proposal. If they are in the private sector, they are making more money, owning and running their own businesses. If the appointing authorities (commissioners) choose an individual who keeps their private business (again making the county engineer position Part-time and not full time), that business would not be able to work on any projects, engineering or surveying related, for the county or counties appointed in. Otherwise, that would be a conflict of interest. This would be a hardship on the business, and a hardship on the public by having another engineering or surveying firm not be able to be hired for service.

2. Appointed County Engineer may not reside within the county that he/she is overseeing - therefore not having the intimate knowledge on the needs of a county's road/bridge/drainage conditions

A County Engineer from their own county knows the roads, bridges, culverts and drainage systems in their county. An appointed engineer from another county would take a long time to gain that understanding.

Typically, counties are around 500-550 square miles. By allowing multiple counties to "share" an engineer would double or triple the area needing to be served at probably no additional pay, for a profession that already pays better in the private sector than in the public arena. The public would not be better served when their part-time engineer is serving in another county.

3. Elected position is a stable position; an appointed position would be in a continual state of flux

For stability, we are elected to a four-year term. The people have that time to decide if we are serving and protecting the public safety, health and welfare properly keeping our transportation system functioning. An appointed position would be at the whim of the commissioners and could be eliminated and changed at any time. All medium and long-range proposed and current design and construction projects would be in a continual state of flux.

4. Appointed Engineer makes the position more political

As an appointed position, it actually takes the independent professionalism out of the office and makes the position politically appointed.

Final Thoughts

Independent, Locally Elected Professional Engineers and Professional Surveyors

It is critical to the citizens of Ohio that the County Engineer remains in an independent locally elected position. Additional benefits of having an independent highly qualified local officeholder:

- Helps ensure that engineers elected as county engineers have the appropriate professional education and experience.
- Ohio Revised Code contains no less than *17 separate sections* relating to surveying, all duties for which a county engineer must ultimately be responsible.
- Is a cost-saving measure for Ohio local governments by streamlining costs because of all the duties they are able to do, combining both engineering and surveying duties.
- Federal Highway Administration requires *documented* evaluation of scour conditions on all bridges in the nation. FHWA has granted Ohio county Engineers the ability to use a "Global Statement" in lieu of taking cross sections. This Global statement basically says that the County Engineer can use their Professional Judgment to determine the channel scour risk based on the fact that they live in the county (required because of election), thus knowing the behavior of the streams in their county. **Ohio is the only state to be granted this exception. It was granted specifically because of the unique requirements of the County Engineer (PE, PS, separately elected and must reside in county).**

Changing the County Engineer position from elected to appointed will have a significant negative impact on services provided to other local officials and the business community.

We are responsible for 26,859 bridges and 29,088 miles of urban and rural roadways that are vital to the continued growth and prosperity of state. Prompt, efficient, consistent and professional services need to be continued with the stability of the independently elected office of County Engineer. Your County Engineers look forward to continuing their professional services to the citizens of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.