



OEC [Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
SB 2 - State Watershed Planning
Presented to the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
May 21, 2019**

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on SB 2. My name is Peter Bucher and I'm the Water Resources Director for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund (OECAF).

Ohio is fortunate to have incredible natural resources from our Great Lake to the Ohio River with numerous lakes, ponds, rivers, and stream in between. These resources are the source of drinking water for millions of Ohioans and they are economic engines for our state. The tourism industry generates over \$40 billion in Ohio with a large portion of that being generated in and around our waterways supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. Unfortunately Ohio's waterways face threats every year like harmful algal blooms, erosion, point and nonpoint sources of pollution that put the public health and economies at risk.

For Lake Erie, the Ohio EPA (OEPA) highlighted the severity of the harmful algal bloom problem in 2018 by designating the open waters of western Lake Erie as impaired for algae in its most recent [water quality report](#). Additionally, the OEPA published another report breaking down [nutrient contributions](#) in major Ohio waterways highlighting how to address this problem throughout the state. Simply put, the harmful algal bloom problems and other threats to our waterways are not going away, and we cannot ignore them.

Senate Bill 2 could play a role in helping mobilize water quality improvement efforts in Ohio if paired with the funding sources being considered this year as well. Ohio is in need of a statewide strategy to deal with water quality problems in smaller geographic areas. With numerous efforts going on to improve water quality in the public, private and nonprofit sectors coordination will be key to ensure funding and efforts are working as efficiently as possible.

Referenced in SB 2 are efforts that are currently underway to create a private, voluntary agricultural conservation program that could play a key role in improving Ohio's water quality. This program is being developed by the "Ohio Agriculture Conservation Working Group". The working group, representing stakeholders from the environmental, farm,

academic, and regulatory communities, has been planning for a comprehensive statewide water quality initiative to benchmark and create a framework for certification of Ohio's farms to support healthy waterways in the state. When implemented, the initiative will identify and provide resources and education on science-based practices for farmers, encourage collaborative learning and sharing across the environmental and farm communities, and document progress of water quality improvements over time.

In addition to these efforts, Ohio must consider all funding, voluntary and legislative tools to sustainably improve our waterways and reduce harmful algal blooms, lead water lines, upgrade water infrastructure and ensure water affordability long-term. While SB 2 as currently written could better align water quality efforts we ask this committee to consider additional measure to be included to make this bill an all encompassing water improvement bill from source to tap.

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank for the opportunity to testify before this committee today. We look forward to working with the Joint Sponsors and this Committee during the upcoming weeks to craft a bill that helps build an statewide plan to protect Ohio's drinking water and preserves Ohio's natural treasures for future generations. I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.