



Ohio's "6119" Regional Water & Sewer Districts

Senate Finance Committee

HB 166

May 23, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit comments in support of HB 166 on behalf of the Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts (CORD). I will focus my comments today on the H2Ohio Program and amendments we are pursuing that would help regional water and wastewater districts develop green infrastructure projects, implement storm water management practices, and better serve their customers.

CORD is a non-profit association established to assist, protect, and advance the interests of Ohio's regional water and sewer districts, also known as "6119 Districts" since they are established under Chapter 6119 of the Ohio Revised Code. 6119 Districts provide potable water, sanitary sewer, and storm water services to over 1 million customers in the State of Ohio.

In his executive budget proposal, Governor DeWine clearly has made water quality a priority. In her testimony before the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee, Ohio EPA Director Laurie Stevenson said the H2Ohio Fund will put our state on the path we need to be on to implement solutions that ensure Ohioans have access to clean and safe water. CORD wants to be a resource in this effort. We recently asked our members for creative solutions that the legislature could implement that would provide districts with additional flexibility to improve water quality and provide better service to their customers. From that initial inquiry we developed four revisions to ORC 6119, that we believe are in line with the governor's efforts surrounding the H2Ohio Program. I have highlighted those suggestions below:

ORC 6119.06 & 6119.09 – Currently regional (6119) districts are able to incentivize and coordinate with other political subdivisions on the acquisition or construction of water resource projects. Prime examples are water and sewer line extensions, water management and green infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, 6119 districts do not have the flexibility to coordinate with private entities on similar projects. Revising these sections to provide that flexibility would help encourage cooperation with, and participation by, private entities in the accomplishment of such projects.

ORC 6119.091 – 6119 districts are currently authorized to offer discount programs to their customers, if the district board of trustees chooses to do so. However, current language is ambiguous as to whether such programs are limited to individuals over the age of 65. Our amendment is intended to clarify that districts may provide discount programs to qualifying customers of any age, if a district board chooses to establish such programs.

Our members have been encouraged by the commitment Ohio's lawmakers have shown in addressing water quality concerns by introducing proposals like SB 2, HB 7, and SJR 1. We hope to be included in the development of these policies and look forward to the work ahead on those important pieces of legislation.

Again, the members of CORD appreciate the governor's and Ohio General Assembly's determination to improve Ohio's water quality. We welcome the opportunity to work with stakeholders as Ohio continues to address this pressing issue. We believe giving regional districts additional flexibility in developing green infrastructure projects and providing services to their customers will complement the funding initiatives being considered by Ohio's legislators. Thank you for considering my comments today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John B. Albers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John B. Albers
Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts (CORD)
Executive Committee Member