



Senate Finance Committee

HB 166

5/23/2019

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Joseph Pheil and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Rural Water Association (ORWA). Thank you for allowing me to provide written comments in support of the H2Ohio program that Governor DeWine included in his biennial budget proposal, HB 166. I would like to applaud Governor DeWine and his team for making water quality a priority in his budget proposal.

Since 1976 ORWA has provided on-site technical assistance to rural communities with water and wastewater systems throughout Ohio. Today, we continue to expand our membership and the base of benefits we provide to our members. Our system members provide water and/or wastewater services to approximately 2.01 million Ohioans.

The H2Ohio program, as proposed by the governor, would dedicate \$900 million over the next ten years for projects designed to improve water quality in Ohio. The first year of the program allocates nearly \$90 million, split among three agencies: the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The \$8.675 allocated to the Ohio EPA is of particular interest to our members, as it would be used to address failing home septic systems and assist in providing water and sewer service in disadvantaged communities.

While the House of Representatives did remove future funding for the H2Ohio program, recent legislation aimed at funding water and sewer infrastructure projects has been introduced, which is an encouraging sign. Legislative proposals like SB 2, HB 7, SJR 1 would ensure a foundation is set,

with dedicated funding, to improve water quality in the state long into the future.

ORWA supports these efforts and have been making similar investments in underserved, rural communities. A few of our programs/services include:

- Providing technical assistance including preventative maintenance and training on proper operating procedures.
- Smoke testing sewer systems to identify and reduce infiltration and inflow that could lead to system overflows going into water ways.
- Establishing source water protection plans that help communities understand the threats and how to best protect their water supply.
- Provide energy efficiency assessments that help reduce operating costs and improve financial stability.
- Offer training on changes and updates to regulations and compliance requirements.

Properly operating and maintaining water and sewer systems is an expense that many rural communities simply can't bear. We would encourage the Ohio General Assembly and Governor DeWine to continue to invest in water and sewer infrastructure needs throughout the state. While the initial funding dedicated to the H2Ohio fund is a starting point, more investment is needed to resolve the infrastructure challenges in our communities. We look forward to working with the DeWine Administration, the Ohio EPA, your colleagues in the Senate, and other like-minded stakeholders on these efforts moving forward.

Thank you allowing me to provide comments today.

Sincerely,

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