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OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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March 18, 2021

The Honorable Stephanie Kunze, Chair
Transportation Committee
Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Sub. HB 74 Transportation Budget

Dear Chair Kunze:

On behalf of the Ohio Township Association (OTA), I am writing to express our support for Sub. House Bill 74, the Transportation Budget, particularly the addition of language increasing township force account limits. This change has been a part of the OTA's legislative priorities for many years.

As you know, the term "force account" refers to the situation in which a public official is statutorily authorized to act as a contractor on a project and the public body does the work itself, employing its own labor and purchasing its own materials. The limits on force account work (R.C. §5575.01) were last increased in 2003, and current thresholds are \$45,000 per project for maintenance and repair and \$15,000 per mile for road construction and reconstruction.

Road maintenance is a mandated duty for townships. Townships are responsible for over 41,000 miles of road and over 80,000 lane miles. While townships are responsible for the largest number of miles of roads in the state, they receive the least amount of funding in comparison to ODOT, counties, and municipalities. Therefore, the burden of maintaining township roads falls primarily at the local level.

While the gas tax was increased two years ago, projected increases for 2020 were not realized due to COVID-19 and local resources continue to be strained. The cost of road maintenance continues to increase – materials, labor, fuel, and equipment are all more expensive than 17 years ago when force account limits were last adjusted. The substitute bill before the Senate raises these limits to \$150,000, reflecting the upward pressure on prices and better enabling townships to complete smaller road projects.

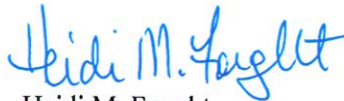
It is important to note that a force account assessment form must be completed before a township can undertake a project that is estimated over \$15,000 for maintenance and repair or \$5,000 per mile for construction and reconstruction (R.C. §117.16). The bill raises both thresholds to \$50,000. The county engineer, a qualified, unbiased expert, is required to review and sign the force account form. The county engineer knows the roads and the township personnel. The county engineer acts as contractor for a township on force account projects must prepare a detailed estimate (R.C. §5575.01(B)).

Updating the force account limits in law would simply reflect the increased cost of doing business today and allow townships to better utilize their own resources for smaller projects.

Additionally, the OTA supports increasing to the Ohio Public Works Commission Local Public Infrastructure funding by \$2 million for emergency road-slip remediation and decreasing the threshold to qualify for the Catastrophic Snowfall Program from 18 to 16 inches in a 24-hour period. Both of these provisions would assist townships in dealing with emergency issues on their roads.

The OTA supports the Senate substitute version of House Bill 74 and appreciates the Senate's consideration of these issues. If you have any questions or concerns about our position, please do not hesitate to contact me or OTA Director of Governmental Affairs Marisa Myers at 614-863-0045.

Sincerely,



Heidi M. Fought
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Ohio Senate