

**Testimony before the Ohio House Economic and Workforce Development  
Committee in support of H.B. 469 to Create the Ohio River Commission of Ohio**

**Robert Naylor, Jefferson County Port Authority**

**Tuesday, December 3, 2024**

Senator Lorenz and members of the Economic and Development Workforce Committee.

My name is Robert Naylor and I serve as the executive director of the Jefferson County Port Authority, a Political Subdivision formed and existing under Chapter 4582 of the Ohio Revised Code (“Port Authority”). The Port Authority serves as Jefferson County’s comprehensive economic development agency, representing all local communities in site improvement and marketing strategies, corporate site selection, and local business expansion programs.

The Port Authority submits this written testimony in support of the creation of the **Ohio River Commission of Ohio** as proposed by the honorable Monica Robb Blasdel and Don Jones. In 2019 a group of river-focused stakeholders met to determine how to promote the economic generator that is the Ohio River. The Ohio River spans over 450 miles along Ohio’s eastern and southern borders and generated \$26.5 billion in economic impact in 2019 through 135 distinct marine terminals. Supporting over 100,000 jobs, over 40 million tons of cargo are transported to and from Ohio annually, anchored by the nation’s top three inland port statistical areas: the Mid-Ohio Valley Port, the Port of Huntington Tristate, and the Ports of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. These inland port statistical areas run along the Ohio River from Hamilton County to Columbiana County.

Ohio boasts access to two distinct waterway systems. Both of these systems independently provide direct access to global maritime markets via the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Gulf of Mexico. Notably, Ohio ranks 8<sup>th</sup> among the fifty states in the United States for tons of cargo handled. While Lake Erie benefits from the Lake Erie Commission, Ohio has no central agency to plan, coordinate, or advocate for the maritime industry along the Ohio River and the counties it touches. Previous efforts to promote the Ohio River Commission of Ohio were not included in the state’s FY 2023-2024 biennium budget. A companion to H.B. 469 has been introduced in the Ohio Senate – S.B. 286 sponsored by Senator Shane Wilkin.

Recent studies by ODOT and the soon-to-be-released (ODOT) Ohio Maritime Plan will factually demonstrate the impact and benefits derived from the Ohio River are greatly unknown or misunderstood, and greatly underutilized. Over the years, maritime funding made available to Ohio’s maritime industry through ODOT’s *Maritime Assistance Program* (MAP) have overwhelmingly funded Lake Erie projects. Only a fraction of MAP funding has reached businesses on the Ohio River.

The Ohio River traverses nearly 1,000 miles and touches six other states before dumping into the Mississippi River, which itself touches an additional ten states. Each state has its own governance agencies and activities along each of their respective shorelines. As a federally designated waterway (a literal “marine highway”), the Ohio River is “operated” by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and is regulated by the U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. EPA. Impacts and issues of the Ohio River cannot be

processed in a vacuum. There are few intrastate movements of cargo within any singular state, and Ohio is no different. Most cargos along the Ohio River are interstate, so economic development opportunities require a national and, indeed, a global perspective.

In a border county such as Jefferson County, the potential of the Ohio River Commission of Ohio to enable outreach to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of West Virginia presents a catalytic economic opportunity for Jefferson County, the counties in the surrounding region, and the State of Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

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

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