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House State and Local Government Committee, Sponsor Testimony on House Bill 497  
May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Thank you, Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, for hearing sponsor testimony today regarding HB 497, a bill that will help to streamline various administrative processes and increase efficiency at the county government level throughout Ohio.

As has been past practice, we worked with the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) and solicited input from the associations representing all other countywide officials as well, in drafting this legislation. We asked each association to provide feedback on tangible, but largely uncontroversial, changes to state law that could allow their offices to operate more efficiently to better serve Ohioans. From there, we pared down the list a bit further, and the result is House Bill 497.

We are not going to itemize each change in our testimony today, but we will highlight a few. House Bill 497 would:

- Require various construction plans and specifications for public improvements be kept on file by the County Engineer instead of the County Auditor’s office.
- Add Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs) as an entity that is able to contract with the county prosecuting attorney for legal services under R.C. 309.09 (D-J).
- Modify the length of time that a county is able to add a public depository in R.C. 135.33(A) from “every four years” to “at least every two years.” This bill would

allow for counties to add public depositories more frequently than every four years and thus provide counties with additional flexibility to make their depository decisions.

- Permit a Board of County Commissioners to more quickly approve small courthouse or jail renovation/repair projects that are under \$25,000. (If the project is over the \$25,000 threshold, the current approval process in R.C. 153.36 remains in effect.)
- Increase the dollar threshold for contracts that must be submitted to the County Prosecutor for approval from \$1,000 to \$20,000. This statute was last updated in 1953 and the increase in the bill will modernize the threshold amount to be consistent with inflation. The language also allows for contract certification by any duly appointed legal counsel of the Board of Commissioners for projects under this threshold.
- Streamline the approval process for counties to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete county property. The language also raises the dollar threshold for a board of commissioners to pass a resolution to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete personal property, from \$2,500 to \$5,000. This change modernizes the statute for inflation and allows for increased donations of obsolete county property with less administrative burden.
- Clarifies, at the request of the County Coroners Association, the definition of “private practice of medicine” to not include performing an autopsy at the request of another coroner. Ohio is already facing a shortage of forensic pathologists and this change will allow Ohio’s forensic pathologists to be able to assist each other in autopsies. The bill will also align the fees that a coroner or deputy coroner could charge for providing expert testimony or a deposition in civil cases. This change would make it a flat fee of “\$350/hour for expert testimony at a trial, hearing or deposition in a civil action.” Currently, expert testimony in the private sector ranges from \$350-\$3,000 per hour.

In the coming weeks we anticipate that the bill will be amended to include several changes requested by the Ohio Judicial Conference (OJC), including a small update to modernize statutes

that govern the way that certain court proceedings, such as international commercial arbitration, are to take place (e.g. in person, in open court, by video, by telephone, etc.). These provisions were intended to be a part of the original introduced version bill but were inadvertently left out.

And, finally, we want to hear your ideas as well. If you or the counties you serve have other common-sense changes that help counties serve our residents, we want this bill to be a vehicle to make that happen.

We are grateful to the CCAO and every countywide organization that has worked with us on this bill. I also want to thank my joint sponsor for all of his work on this legislation and for allowing me to join him. We want to thank you all for listening and will attempt to answer any questions you may have.