



**OHIO PARKS AND
RECREATION ASSOCIATION**

Woody Woodward, Executive Director

**HOUSE BILL 1 OPPONENT TESTIMONY
OHIO HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
WOODY WOODWARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MARCH 14, 2023**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Woody Woodward, Executive Director of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association and I am here this afternoon to express our concern with elements of House Bill 1.

I understand that this bill has been described as a “work in progress.” However, I would be negligent in representing our more than 2,300 members if I did not state our serious concern about the provision in House Bill 1 which decreases, from 35% to 31.5%, the percentage of real property value that is subject to taxation. This change alone would represent a ten percent cut in property tax levy collection for nearly every Metropolitan Park District in the state.

Mr. Chairman, in your home county, House Bill 1 would cut the budget of Summit Metro Parks by \$2.4 million annually. This cut would eliminate or reduce all public events, drastically reduce hours at nature centers and public facilities and reduce maintenance staff by 20%, making it impossible to maintain their high standards for maintenance and cleanliness.

Vice Chair Merrin, the situation would be similar for Metroparks Toledo. This proposal would cut \$2.2 million from that park district and would have the impact of significantly slowing progress on the Glass City Riverwalk, a major riverfront restoration and downtown revitalization project which has broad community support.

And Ranking Member Troy, in Lake County, the park district would face a \$2.5 million annual cut, forcing the district to cancel most or all public programs and lay off programming staff.

The stories are similar for virtually every other park district around the state.

Over the last decade, more than 95% of levies sought by Metropark districts have been approved by voters. The most recent levy in Summit County received 73% of the vote; in Lucas County 70% of the vote; and, in Lake County 58% of the vote. Again, the results are similar in counties around the state. Ohio voters strongly support their park districts.

While we understand the bill includes language stating that the General Assembly intends to hold local governments harmless from the financial impact of this bill, no appropriation is included which matches this intention with dollars. Still, while we have no reason to believe that this General Assembly will not make good on its intention, we also have no reason to believe that future General Assemblies—perhaps facing tighter state budgets—will be bound by the intention expressed by this one.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 1. We applaud your efforts to continue to make Ohio an attractive place for businesses to locate and for families to live. We are proud of the work that Ohio’s parks do to help us realize those goals and we look forward to continuing to work with you in pursuit of them.

I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions you may have.