

Ohio Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

Proponent Testimony of the
Ohio Water Partnership
Sub. House Bill 33
May 3, 2023

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in regard to funding of water quality issues, specifically the H2Ohio program, contained in House Bill 33, the biennial budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Jim Samuel, and I serve as executive director of the non-profit, 501(C)(3) Ohio Water Partnership.

The Ohio Water Partnership is a broad-based, diverse coalition of businesses advocating for sound water policy. Our mission is to ensure a consistent, effective and equitable approach in protecting and preserving Ohio's natural water resources with a focus on promoting Ohio's competitive advantage in clean, safe, affordable water in all its forms across the state.

From Fortune 500 companies to small home-based businesses, the Ohio Water Partnership includes companies and organizations of all sizes who recognize that the quality of Ohio's water affects the bottom line. As we like to say, *Ohio water means business.*

Governor DeWine's initial budget request reflected a clear priority for protecting Ohioans' access to water and ensuring it remains a driver of economic growth for years to come. In that initial request, the H2Ohio program was looking at a funding level of \$153.4 million for each of the next two fiscal years. We were pleased to see that this funding level was left intact as the budget emerged from the House. And we thank the members of the House of Representatives for that endorsement.

Broken down by key agencies, that funding level means the following:

- \$69 million for the Ohio Department of Agriculture. ODA's primary role is creating and funding programs to help farmers implement best management practices (BMPs) to reduce soil erosion and nutrient runoff.
- \$31.3 million for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. OEPA's primary focus is funding infrastructure improvements across Ohio, improving community drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, replacing failing home sewage treatment systems, and addressing lead service lines. OEPA will also play a role in the new H2Ohio Rivers Initiative with \$11.4 million in funding per year.
- \$53 million for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. ODNR's primary focus is building, restoring and enhancing nutrient-trapping wetlands. In addition, they will fund the new H2Ohio Rivers Initiative with \$18.1 million/year which will include land acquisition, monitoring of critical issues and identifying data-driven solutions to address the problems identified.
- \$132,000 for the Lake Erie Commission. The LEC helps to quarterback many of the H2Ohio multi-agency meetings, tracking reports and publishing the H2Ohio Annual Report.

As an organization built around the interests of the business community, we support this program, we support the agencies efforts to provide data showing progress toward nutrient reduction goals, we support the farmers reducing nutrient runoff with the help of the Department of Ag, we support the building of natural wetlands by ODNR, and we especially support the critical water infrastructure funding from the Ohio EPA.

To that end, the Ohio Water Partnership supports the state's overall efforts, especially that of JobsOhio, to highlight Ohio's water advantage. We believe the state should consider funding a comprehensive study to evaluate the infrastructure needs throughout the state to determine how the state can best leverage its water resources for smart economic growth while also protecting and preserving our state's water resources.

Chairman Schaffer, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony. I would be happy to try and answer any questions you may have.