



**Ohio Senate**  
Senate Building  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
Phone: (614) 466-8156  
Wilkin@ohiosenate.gov

**Committee**  
Small Business & Economic Opportunity  
- *Vice Chair*  
Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Energy & Public Utilities  
Veterans & Public Safety

**SHANE WILKIN**  
State Senator  
17th Senate District

### Sponsor Testimony

Senate Bill 286

Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present Sponsor Testimony in support of Senate Bill 286.

SB 286 and its companion, HB 469, will create the Ohio River Commission within the Department of Development. The hope is that by creating the Ohio River Commission, Ohio will avoid another Lake Erie situation by **proactively** creating a body that will help develop and promote economic development, marine cargo terminal operations, and travel and tourism on the Ohio River and its tributaries rather than waiting to create a commission until after problems already exist.

In addition, SB 286:

- Specifies the Commission's powers and duties, which include developing a master plan for Ohio River infrastructure and transportation projects
- Requires every other Ohio authority, commission, department, or agency to provide the Commission with data, plans, research, and any other information that the Commission requests to assist it in performing its duties
- Allows the Commission to issue grants and loans for the development of the Ohio River infrastructure or for continuing or instituting Ohio River transportation in Ohio
- Creates the Ohio River Commission Fund to be used for the Commission's purposes and to pay its administrative expenses
- Requires the Controlling Board to approve any expenditures by the Department of Development, the Commission, or any other state agency for capital improvements to

promote economic development, marine cargo terminal operations, and travel and tourism on the Ohio River and its tributaries

Creating the Ohio River Commission is of the utmost importance because just last month at Ohio Tourism Day, Director Mihalik announced that tourism is at an all-time high, exceeding \$56 billion annually and it is clear from all the partners that attended that there is so much to do and see in Ohio. This legislation will help **proactively** ensure that Ohio remains “the heart of it all,” by bolstering economic development and tourism along the Ohio River and its surrounding areas for generations to come.

Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and fellow members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, I thank each of you for your time and interest in SB 286, I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.