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Testimony Senate Select Committee on Public Works

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I am a member of the Ohio Township Association, a Township Trustee in Concord Township, Lake County and the President of the Lake County Township Association.

I am here to speak in support of Senate Joint Resolution 4, which reauthorizes the State Capital Improvement Program. Ohio's infrastructure supports essential functions of our state. These funds support maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply, wastewater treatment systems, stormwater collection, and solid waste management. These functions are all critical components that keep Ohio operating smoothly.

Since 1987, the Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) has been at the forefront of financing local government infrastructure projects through SCIP. Funded by voter approved bonds, this program has been renewed three times by Ohioans and is set to expire in July 2025. **I strongly support the placement of the program's fourth renewal the May ballot to prevent any delays in continuing this essential work.**

Ohio's townships benefit from SCIP. Many projects funded are collaborative efforts that involve partnerships between townships and their county engineer. Numerous township projects address road safety issues, such as high vehicular crash areas or intersection and sight distance impairments.

Townships in Lake County own 150 miles of roads, having received over \$1.4 million in funding. Receiving this critical funding keeps our communities safe and maintains property values. Without this state driven funding, maintaining our communities is much more challenging.

During the current authorization period, which includes nine of ten funding rounds, Ohio's 1,308 townships have received \$194.1 million. In total, the OPWC has granted \$2.3 billion across the state to local governments and water and sewer districts.

I strongly support SJR 4 and the request to increase OPWC funding by \$50 million annually. A healthy and comprehensive infrastructure is essential to continued economic development in Ohio. In this new reality of high inflation these state dollars are critically important to Ohio Townships.

On the heels of historic inflation, funding local government is becoming more and more challenging in a growing anti-tax, anti-property tax environment. I urge the committee's support for the proposed increase in funding, and for the renewal issue to be placed on the May ballot. Allow me to demonstrate how difficult it is for townships to develop new funding opportunities for critical services.

In Lake County, we see a strong anti-tax sentiment, making passing levies to fund and support local government, very difficult. I have two specific examples, two from 2023, the other from 2024. Painesville Township narrowly approved a new police levy by 19 votes, or 3% margin, while a levy in Perry Township for police protection, failed. In Concord Township in November 5th this year, Concord voters approved a new fire levy by 130 votes, or 1%. When levies for public safety are actively campaigned against, and narrowly pass, it underscores the need for funding from the state to support our critical infrastructure needs.

While the state makes progress lowering taxes for Ohio tax payers, the burden falls to local communities at the cost of essential state funding. Local communities, in particular townships, are burdened by cuts to from the state, increasing the pressure to seek tax increases locally, turning local elected leaders into tax raising villains. Keeping state funding programs such as this intact supports a low tax mentality in our townships.

While the passage of SJR 4 will provide additional funding to the OPWC program, including the Small Government program, the I encourage the General Assembly to increase OPWC resources to the Small Government program by 10% during the next transportation budget. These funds awarded as grants or loans would greatly impact the 35% of residents that live in townships across the state and will provide a fairer distribution of the OPWC funds.

Thank you for your consideration of the perspective of Ohio townships. **I strongly supports SJR 4 and the request to increase OPWC funding by \$50 million annually.** In closing, I want express my appreciation to Senator Chavez and Senator Craig for sponsoring this legislation.