



June 18, 2025

The Honorable Angie King
Chairwoman, Ohio House Local Government Committee
77 S High Street, Floor 11
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Written Opponent Testimony on House Bill 139

Chair King, Vice Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims, and members of the Ohio House Local Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on House Bill 139. My name is Joe Pheil, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Rural Water Association (ORWA). ORWA is a non-profit member-based organization that provides free and affordable technical assistance, education, and support to water and wastewater utilities across Ohio. We help utilities maintain financial, managerial, and technical stability while protecting public health.

We deeply respect and appreciate Representative Hall's intent to enhance public safety by ensuring fire hydrants are functional and reliable. The goal of protecting our communities is one we all share. However, we respectfully submit that HB 139, while well-intentioned, may place significant unintended financial and operational burdens on Ohio's small villages, particularly those with limited resources and aging infrastructure.

First, the mandated annual hydrant testing and maintenance requirements present a considerable challenge for small villages with limited staffing and budgets. Many small villages rely on just a few public works employees, part-time staff, or contracted help. Conducting flow tests on every hydrant is a labor-intensive process that will overwhelm these limited resources. For villages opting to hire outside contractors or specialists to perform these tests, the costs can quickly add up, with per-hydrant fees straining already tight budgets. The annual testing requirement in this legislation will create a significant operational burden for small communities without the personnel to manage it efficiently.

Additionally, the testing regimen is likely to create an additional financial burden on villages and an immediate backlog of deferred maintenance in villages with aging infrastructure. While identifying these issues is critical for safety, the immediate budget shortfall that villages will face in complying with this bill could be overwhelming. Repairing or replacing a single fire hydrant can cost several thousand dollars in parts and labor, and small villages may face multiple such expenses following mandated tests. For cash-strapped local

governments, these unexpected costs could necessitate seeking grants, loans, or even raising water rates or taxes to comply with the law's requirement to repair defective hydrants. While the legislation aims to improve safety, it may unintentionally place small villages in a precarious financial position, forcing difficult budgetary choices.

Furthermore, implementing the testing requirements may require villages to invest in specialized equipment and training. Conducting hydrant flow tests demands tools such as flow diffusers, pitot gauges, and pressure gauges, as well as personal protective gear. Many small villages' volunteer fire departments or water departments may not currently own this equipment. Personnel may also require training or certification, such as workshops to meet NFPA 25 standards or to become certified fire hydrant inspectors. These costs, in conjunction with physical repairs, are significant for villages. The goal of ensuring accurate and safe testing is important, but the upfront investment required will undoubtedly strain the resources of Ohio's smallest communities.

The ongoing compliance obligations of HB 139 would also introduce recurring costs that small villages will struggle to sustain. The bill's record-keeping requirements necessitate organized documentation of each hydrant's tests and maintenance, which will require investments in updated software, filing systems, or dedicated staff time. If the State Fire Marshal mandates reports or periodic audits, villages will face additional administrative expenses to comply. These costs are not a one-time expense but a permanent line item in annual budgets, covering personnel, record management, and the testing program itself. While the intent to ensure accountability is understandable, the cumulative effect of these ongoing obligations diverts limited resources from other critical community needs that much more.

In conclusion, again, while we fully support the goal of ensuring reliable fire hydrants to protect Ohio's communities, HB 139 imposes significant financial and operational challenges on small villages. The costs of annual testing, repairs, equipment, training, and compliance will undoubtedly strain already limited budgets, potentially forcing difficult trade-offs or increased taxes or increased rates for residents. We respectfully urge the committee to consider these unintended consequences and explore ways to support small municipalities, such as providing funding assistance or flexibility in implementation, to achieve the bill's safety objectives without placing undue burdens on Ohio's smallest communities. Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact our government affairs representative, Michael Guastella, at michael@gpgrhr.com.