

Proponent Testimony of John Sarver
Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy
Before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
House Bill 96 – Budget Appropriations for the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel
May 7, 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 96. My name is John Sarver, and I am here on behalf of Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy (OPAE) to express our support for the budget request from the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel (OCC).

OPAE is a coalition dedicated to ensuring low-income Ohioans have access to safe, reliable, and affordable energy. Candidly, in prior years, we have not had the best professional relationship with the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel.

However, we have recently seen opportunities to collaborate with the OCC. Our collaboration with the OCC has been instrumental in achieving meaningful consumer protections and ensuring that energy affordability remains a priority in the regulatory landscape.

We would like to commend Maureen Willis for her leadership as the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel. Under her guidance, the OCC is a strong and independent voice for Ohio’s residential utility consumers that is also pragmatic and realistic. Ms. Willis’s dedication to consumer advocacy has been critical in holding utilities accountable and ensuring that Ohioans receive fair rates and reliable service. Her leadership has reinforced the OCC’s role as a crucial watchdog for the public interest, and we deeply appreciate her efforts.

The OCC, which is funded by assessments on utilities, needs the resources to continue its vital work. The OCC has been able to save \$29 for every dollar spent on the agency for residential consumers. They have been producing one of the best returns on investment for consumers in the state by saving residential consumers \$977 million since 2019.

Therefore, OPAE supports the OCC’s requested budget increase of \$1,974,079 for FY26 and an additional \$165,747 for FY27 and asks that House Bill 96 be amended to reflect their request. This additional funding is necessary to support their continued and increased advocacy and education for residential Ohio utility consumers.

The OCC plays a unique and essential role in utility regulation, ensuring that residential customers have an advocate in complex regulatory proceedings. Adequate funding will allow the OCC to effectively represent the interests of Ohio consumers, particularly as the state navigates ongoing energy challenges and policy changes.

On behalf of OPAE and the communities we serve, I urge the committee to support the OCC’s request for an increase in budget appropriations in House Bill 96. Ensuring the OCC has the funding it needs will help protect Ohioans from unfair utility practices and maintain a balanced regulatory environment that prioritizes consumer welfare.

Thank you for your time and consideration.