



Ohio Water Means Business.

Ohio Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

Interested Party Testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 96

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Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today on behalf of the Ohio Water Partnership in strong support of the H2Ohio program. My name is Jim Samuel, and I serve as the executive director of the Ohio Water Partnership, a statewide coalition of businesses advocates united by the mission of protecting Ohio's water resources and ensuring sustainable access to clean water for all Ohioans.

The Ohio Water Partnership (OWP) is a 501c3 founded in 2020 in recognition of the critical role that clean, accessible, and well-managed water systems play in Ohio's economy, public health, and quality of life. Our members represent a cross-section of business stakeholders—including agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and hospitality – who understand that Ohio's economic growth is dependent on water and that our water future requires collaboration, innovation, and a consistent commitment to common sense, science-based solutions. We work to advance policies that safeguard our drinking water, preserve our lakes, rivers and aquifers, and promote resilient water infrastructure.

The Importance of H2Ohio

H2Ohio is one of the most comprehensive and forward-looking water quality initiatives in state history - and maybe in the country. Created in 2019, H2Ohio was designed to address the persistent and costly problem of nutrient pollution—especially phosphorus runoff—that has contributed to harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie, contamination of drinking water systems, and long-term degradation of Ohio's natural resources.

The program is a model of interagency collaboration, between the Ohio departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, each playing a role in implementing targeted solutions. These include:

- Voluntary, science-based, best management practices (BMPs) on farmland to reduce nutrient runoff;
- Wetland restoration projects that filter pollutants, improve biodiversity, and enhance flood control;
- Infrastructure upgrades to improve wastewater and stormwater management systems and reduce the number of lead water lines.



Importantly, H2Ohio has built strong relationships with farmers and landowners across northwest Ohio, creating a foundation of trust that allows conservation practices to be implemented at scale.

Why Restoration of Funding Is Critical

Under the DeWine Administration's initial budget proposal, H2Ohio was slated to receive \$270 million over the biennium—an investment that reflects the program's proven success and ongoing demand across Ohio's watersheds. However, the subsequent version passed by the House reduces this amount by \$120 million, a cut that would force agencies to massively scale back successful practices, delay wetland restorations, and potentially lose momentum with landowners who have committed to multi-year nutrient management plans. In the case of the EPA, it would just reduce the amount of spending on critical infrastructure in your districts and others across the state.

These reductions are not just line items—they are real setbacks in Ohio's fight to implement practices and programs that preserve Ohio's most important natural resource. Each dollar invested in H2Ohio yields returns in the form of reduced water treatment costs, improved fish and wildlife habitat, increased recreational value, and fewer public health threats.

Furthermore, Ohio is not alone in facing water challenges. Our neighboring states are advancing similar nutrient reduction programs and leveraging federal dollars to modernize their water strategies. Cutting H2Ohio now sends the wrong message at the wrong time: that Ohio is retreating from leadership just as other states are accelerating forward and trying to mimic Ohio.

Clean water is not a partisan issue, and like every government program, deserves legislative scrutiny to ensure funds are carefully managed and effective. H2Ohio is a promise to every Ohioan—from the farmer in Fairfield County to the family boating on Lake Erie—that our state will steward its most vital resource with integrity, investment, and vision. We respectfully urge the Senate to restore the full \$120 million in H2Ohio funding as originally proposed in the As-Introduced version of HB96.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to try to answer any questions you may have.