



STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

House Bill 96 – Interested Party Testimony

Jonathan Hofstetter
Wayne County Commissioner

May 14th, 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Jonathan Hofstetter; I am in my third year as a Wayne County Commissioner and serve on the CCAO Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee as the Chairman. I have lived in Sugar Creek Twp nearly all of my life and grew up on an 80-acre farm. The changes in the Ag industry have been part of our story as well. We do enjoy living in the area; however our farm now belongs to another family. The family continues to till the ground and raise animals, just like my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. My story changed at a young age when I became a mechanic, then a fire medic, and now a public servant. I enjoy helping other families and friends work in agriculture, even when our family no longer lives on a farm. Perhaps someday I will be able to help one of my children start their own farm.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) on several key provisions included in House Bill 96 that will strengthen all 88 counties and the state alike.

H2Ohio

Improving water quality across the state is a priority for counties, whether it be Lake Erie's Western Basin, the Ohio River or points in between. Over the past two years, H2Ohio has been an important resource to agricultural producers and communities across the state. Over 2 million acres of farmland have been enrolled in nutrient best management practices, over 200 of wetland projects are underway and hundreds of failing home septic systems and lead service lines have been replaced. All these actions promote improved water quality for a healthier environment and healthier citizens.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

CCAO is pleased to see continued investment in this important program. Ohio's water quality challenges are complex and will require resources paired alongside accountability measures. The investments contained in the Governor's introduced budget provides the necessary funding, guided by leading scientific research, to produce long-term improvements in Ohio's water resources.

CCAO supports agricultural producers who utilize best management practices to reduce nutrient runoff. These producers should be recognized for their efforts to improve water quality.

Soil and Water Conservation

Addressing Ohio's complex water quality challenges requires input and investment from many sources. The federal, state, and local governments along with the agricultural industry all must play a role in protecting Ohio's water resources. For CCAO, improving water quality begins with funding the boots on the ground at Ohio's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). SWCDs provide expert assistance to both agricultural and urban stakeholders in all 88 counties. The boots on the ground are the fundamental key to implementing best management practices. They work with the farmer on an individual farm to farm basis to reduce nutrient loss, a key driver of harmful algal blooms.

Counties invest considerable funds to support the work of SWCDs, and it is important that the state likewise support the important work of these entities. In recent years the state has been matching local funding efforts within the low 90 percent range which has been an improvement compared to the mid 2010's. CCAO supports a 1:1.1 state-local match for SWCDs, and CCAO is supportive of the funding included in the budget proposal towards this effort.

Brownfield Remediation Fund & Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Fund

Within previous budgets, the Brownfield Remediation Fund was created to help assess and cleanup environmentally contaminated sites. We commend the Legislature for the inclusion of this program, and the Ohio Department of Development in its administration of this successful program.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

The Brownfield Remediation Program has awarded \$636 million worth of grants to 626 projects in 86 of Ohio's 88 counties. While this is a significant investment in the assessment and cleanup of brownfields, the need remains for grant dollars to remediate and redevelop these blighted brownfields into productive use.

Within the previous budget all 88 counties were made eligible for at least \$1 million in funding, with any additional funding being on a first-come, first-served basis.

Almost all of Ohio's 88 counties used \$1 million for either assessment projects or cleanup/remediation projects, which is the final step in the process to address environmental contamination and will allow these brownfields to become new industrial and commercial sites, new housing, mixed-use space, or developable land.

However, there were many projects that were granted assessment dollars, which merely determines that contamination is present on the site but does not provide cleanup dollars to complete the work. Without additional funding, these projects will likely remain contaminated, and unable to move into productive economic engines. The additional investment in funds will allow the remaining projects to compete for cleanup grants.

We are very supportive of the \$250 million added within the house budget that will continue the Brownfield Remediation Fund, allowing this program to address the outstanding assessment projects and additional projects that continue to pose an environmental risk to Ohio.

Another important program that is funded within the house budget is the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Fund. This program is funded at the level of \$43 million for FY26-27 which will help continue the demolition of commercial and residential buildings and the revitalization of surrounding properties. Just like brownfield funding, the majority of Ohio's counties applied for Demolition funding during the previous rounds.

Since the inception of the program more than \$233 million has been awarded to support roughly 5,000 projects in every county within Ohio. We have also appreciated that a portion of funding is guaranteed to every county if they apply and meet the guidelines.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

I believe an essential aspect to remember would be that Brownfields are usually located where utilities and services are also located. Cleaning up these sites would prevent the loss of farmland. I think instead of new utilities being developed, it would be cheaper to clean up a site and redevelop it for the next project. Our farm fields shouldn't be viewed as a new opportunity. They are an active factory vital to feeding our State and beyond.

Farmland Preservation

CCAO supports the funding to help administer the multiple farmland preservation programs within Ohio. We have counties that partner with a farmer/landowner to participate within the Agricultural Easement Donation Program (AEDP) as well as the Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP). We also have counties that include my home county of Wayne that use the Agricultural Security Area (ASA) program.

Wayne County is leading the way in terms of the amount of land enrolled in the ASA program. With approximately 11,000 acres approved, our farmers have taken advantage of the program. Our County believes in our agricultural heritage and takes it seriously. This isn't to say that there isn't pressure from all forms of development. The worst pressure is historically high land prices. I have heard on an average, \$35,000 to \$45,000 per acre has been ongoing over the last few years. Yet we have farmers who are making their wishes known; they desire to keep the soil producing food. I support all efforts that ODA and Secretary Baldrige have made to help maintain farm fields in their current land use status.

Within the budget, Governor DeWine and Secretary Baldrige included \$1 million in funding for local governments to develop and use plans, that will help Counties identify what land to preserve and where to grow. These investments will keep over 20,000 acres of Ohio farmland in active production while allowing farmers and landowners to invest in their operations and land.

OSU Extension, OARDC & Sea Grant

Ohio State University Extension builds better lives and stronger communities through partnerships and sharing knowledge. It supports Ohio's number one industry, agriculture, and develops future leaders through 4-H youth development.

Extension connects the knowledge of the university to Ohioans to benefit their lives, businesses and communities through programming in family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, community development, and agriculture and natural resources.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

Extension's 4-H program is a particular point of pride for many counties. Tens of thousands of young Ohioans participate in 4-H in some capacity each year. The leadership and educational skills our young people acquire through 4-H prepare them for healthy and productive lives and help develop the next generation of local leaders.

CCAO would like to offer support for amendment #sc1234 which will flat fund ALI 235511. Within the introduced and House passed versions of the budget; funding levels were decreased by roughly 3 percent. This funding will help OSU Extension continue to provide research to study nutrient management within Ohio's lakes as well as staffing needs and many other programs they administer that help support our partnership with OSU Extension.

Ohio Sea Grant works to protect Lake Erie's health through research, education, outreach and partnerships. Ohio Sea Grant's Stone Laboratory is an important center of scientific research and education for Lake Erie's toughest environmental challenges. As Ohio continues its fight for a healthier Lake Erie, investment in Ohio Sea Grant is important to furthering this effort.

OARDC, the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center, is the research arm of the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences of The Ohio State University and focuses on scientific disciplines critical to food security, the environment, human health, and pest management. The key to Ohio's competitiveness in the agricultural industry is continued support of innovation through this program.

OARDC partners with producers, industry, government and citizens to explore new products and approaches; enhance profitability for agricultural businesses; and to maximize the impact on the health of the environment and human life.

CCAO would like to offer support for amendment #sc1235 which will flat fund ALI 235535. Within the introduced and House passed versions of the budget; funding levels were decreased by roughly 3 percent. We believe this is a worthwhile investment in Ohio's communities, environment, and economy.

Other Item's of Support

Pollinators play a very important role within agriculture as a third of the world's crops rely on pollination which increases crop yields. CCAO supports language within the budget that removes the \$5 registration fee on approximately 7,000 Ohio apiaries and replaces it with a \$50 Queen Bee Inspection fee which will include roughly 800 apiaries.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

We also support language that was added within the House version of the budget that gives counties the ability to appoint more than one deputy apiarist. This language will allow fast-growing counties to keep up with the increases of apiaries within their counties.

A deputy county apiarist is responsible for inspecting every apiary within their county boundaries which in many cases cannot be done with the use of one apiarist. This provision will help fill the gap to make sure every apiary is inspected as well as relieving ODA of having to provide state support to help assist with the inspection process.

The Ohio House also added language within the budget to fund the U.S. Route 30 OARnet Broadband Extension project. This project will provide middle mile infrastructure along the entirety of U.S. Route 30 within Ohio. Currently middle mile infrastructure is non-existent within the Route 30 corridor.

Building middle mile infrastructure is vital for economic growth and for the enhancement to quality of life for Ohioans throughout the Route 30 Region.

The project will encompass two “legs” from the preexisting Ohio Academic Resources Network (“OARnet”) backbone network and points-of-presence, one from the Canton area and the other from the Lima area, which will link up in Mansfield following Route 30.

The funding would support 260 miles of fiber with a cost of \$60,000 - \$100,000 per mile cost. The funding request also takes into account an estimated \$1.5 million to build a Point-of-Presence (POP) for the 179th Cyberspace Wing located in Richland County. This infrastructure will provide a critical necessity for redundant circuits in the event another internet/broadband provider has outages.

The budget included \$20 million which, based on an analysis that was done, would sufficiently fund this request. However, we have noticed that the funding allocated towards this project is coming from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD). Our belief is that the \$20 million that has been allocated will not be able to be used for this project as BEAD funding can only be used for last mile infrastructure and for addresses that have been approved through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) process.





STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

CCAO fully supports the Ohio House's intentions with the inclusion of funding for the U.S. Route 30 Broadband project, however we would ask that another source of funding be used to fund this infrastructure.

Thank you Chair and committee members for your time. As priorities for Ohio's operating budget are discussed, CCAO respectfully asks the General Assembly to consider and preserve these investments in crucial services provided to Ohioans. Thank you for your consideration.

