

Ohio Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

Interested Party Testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 96

Vince Messerly, President

Stream and Wetlands Foundation

14 May 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of funding for the H2Ohio program. My name is Vince Messerly, and I am the president of the Stream and Wetlands Foundation, a non-profit company based in Lancaster.

I urge the Ohio Senate to fully restore Governor DeWine's funding request for the H2Ohio program in the FY 26-27 state budget. The recent proposal by the Ohio House of Representatives to reduce H2Ohio funding from \$270 million to \$120 million for the biennium would severely undermine Ohio's progress in improving water quality and protecting vital natural resources. Since its inception, H2Ohio has delivered measurable benefits across the state, particularly in the reduction of phosphorous and nitrogen runoff that directly contribute to harmful algal blooms that have threatened drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystems, and public health.

The program's comprehensive approach to improve water quality and reduce nutrient loading includes agricultural best management practices, wetland restoration, and critical water infrastructure upgrades. Notable program accomplishments include:

- **Agriculture:** the Ohio Department of Agriculture has worked with over 3,200 Ohio farmers to voluntarily enroll over 2.2 million acres of farmland in H2Ohio's nutrient management programs.
- **Wetlands:** the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has funded 142 wetland restoration projects under the H2Ohio program, totaling 14,606 acres of re-established wetlands and buffers. Wetlands provide critical services related to nutrient uptake while also delivering ancillary benefits tied to flood storage and wildlife habitat.
- **Water Infrastructure:** using funding from H2Ohio, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency has addressed 312 failing Home Sewage Treatment Systems (HSTS, e.g., septic systems), replaced hundreds of public and private lead service lines, and funded drinking water and wastewater plant infrastructure improvements that serve over 580,000 Ohioans.


Maintaining funding for H2Ohio is essential to continue to build on the program's momentum and ensure that Ohio remains a leader in pioneering, goal-oriented stewardship of

water resources. Maintaining and improving water quality is not an option – it is imperative for all of us. Fully funding H2Ohio is an investment in our future. The H2Ohio program is just now hitting its stride. Cutting funding now will move the program backwards and re-starting the H2Ohio initiative will be more costly, and valuable time will have been lost.

Since Ohio's inception, our economy has been built on the availability of fresh, abundant, clean water - from the establishment of canals and gristmills to the establishment of chip foundries today. I believe it is imperative that we continue to protect high quality water resources and rehabilitate degraded water resources to ensure the success of future generations of Ohioans. As one of the most water-rich states in the nation, Ohio's rivers and lakes are not only vital to public health and ecological integrity but also serve as a key driver of economic development, making our state an attractive place to live, work, and do business. I respectfully ask that the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee restore H2Ohio funding to safeguard these critical assets for current and future generations.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you have questions regarding our support for the H2Ohio program, please contact me at (740) 654-4016 or at vmesserly@streamandwetlands.org.

Sincerely,



Vincent E. Messerly, PE
President