

Chairman Cirino, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Hope Taft, First Lady 1999-2007 and now I volunteer for the Heritage Garden, the Ohio Scenic Rivers Association and the Little Miami Watershed Network and sit on the Little Miami Advisory Council but today I am mainly representing myself, a taxpayer.

I am very concerned what the House cuts to the H2Ohio funds will do, so I **urge you to restore the Governor's funding level for the H2Ohio program and eliminate the House ban on using these funds to buy land or conservation easements.**

The H2Ohio program is designed to address the complex issues facing Ohio's waterways and the communities that depend on them. Ohio's plentiful water resources provide drinking water, recreational opportunities and a strong economy for millions of people. Ohio is water rich and is a desired location by many companies. Other places with less water would like some of it too. But it will be worthless as an asset if we do not take care of it.

Sub. HB 96 would prohibit the use of H2Ohio funds for land acquisition or conservation easements by ODNR, OEPA, and OAg. H2OhioRivers is the newest part of H2Ohio and those rivers, like the Little Miami River, that flow into the Ohio River, use this part the most to preserve portions of riverbanks. So H2Ohio is now a statewide program.

This cut to H2Ohio would also greatly impact the ability to address the chronic harmful algal blooms that plague our waterways in addition to Lake Erie, drinking water issues, and stormwater and wastewater infrastructure projects across the state.

People depend on their communities and the state to provide them with clean, drinkable water free from "forever chemicals" and other harmful chemicals and brought to their homes uncontaminated through modern infrastructure. The H2Ohio program can do this.

Wetlands are like the kidneys of the environment. 90% of Ohio's wetlands have already been destroyed. We need to preserve and increase the number of wetlands to help Nature clean our waters, so they stay drinkable, swimmable, and fishable.

Wetlands filter out chemicals and nutrients, reduce runoff, help prevent floods and provide habitat so are a very good investment. So are floodplains. When Rivers and streams rise, due to severe rainfall, water must go somewhere, and if flood plains are not available, it will flood roads, houses, or parklands.

Flooding will become worse as more open land is covered in hardscape that cannot absorb rain or snow rain bombs we are now beginning to experience.

Our rivers are becoming clogged with sediment that reduces aquatic populations that are the foundation of the food chain. It also makes the habitats of some rivers and streams less conducive homes to certain fish.

Buffer zones along all waterways are needed to slow down erosion, sediment, pollution, nutrient runoff and other manmade threats but provide habitat for wildlife. These buffer zones are the best investment the state can make because of the great variety of services they provide.

H2Ohio funds are needed to address the multiple issues involved in providing clean water to keep it fishable, swimmable and drinkable. If you don't erase the ban on the state purchasing land or conservation easements, we won't have clean water to drink and keep us live longer than 3 days! We won't have the employee base to fill all the jobs industry needs.

The consequences of not protecting our water are too great. The ripple effect of not investing in H2Ohio will affect every segment of life and business in the state. How can the state expect to get the benefits and good results H2Ohio has produced so far, if you tie the arms of agencies involved behind their backs?

Ohio's 44,000 miles of rocky bottom streams and rivers need to be protected so water stays in Ohio and works to our long-term advantage. The future of the state as a place to live, work and play depend on your foresight in protecting it for today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow so our great-grandchildren can live, work and play here.

Please restore the cuts to H2Ohio in Sub HB 96 and eliminate its ban of using these funds to buy land or conservation easements

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