

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Presented by Sarah Hippensteel Hall, Miami Conservancy District

May 30, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sarah Hippensteel Hall, and I serve as Manager of Communications, Outreach, and Stewardship at the Miami Conservancy District, a regional agency that has protected the people of Southwest Ohio, property, and economy from devastating floods for over 100 years.

Today, I speak in **strong support of the H2Ohio program** and urge you to **fully restore its funding**. This is not just an investment in water, it's an investment in the strength of our state's economy, agriculture, and public health.

H2Ohio delivers **measurable, cost-effective results**. It empowers farmers with voluntary, science-based tools to reduce nutrient runoff and improve soil health. It restores wetlands that naturally filter pollution, reduce flooding, and protect our drinking water. And it lays the foundation for **sustainable economic growth**, especially in rural communities.

In Southwest Ohio, H2Ohio is key to launching the **Miami Rivers Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**, a USDA Farm Bill program. If state dollars are available, we can unlock **more than \$276 million in federal funds** to support local farmers and protect our land and water. But that match opportunity only exists if Ohio maintains its share.

Cutting H2Ohio by \$120 million would cost us far more in the long run. It jeopardizes federal leverage, slows momentum in nutrient reduction, and risks our progress in protecting water resources that are **critical to business, agriculture, and community prosperity**.

Clean, reliable water isn't just an environmental issue, it's a **pillar of economic development**. Companies looking to locate or expand in Ohio consistently cite access to clean water as a top priority. Communities across our state are investing in water infrastructure, knowing it pays dividends in jobs, business growth, and quality of life.

I also urge you to consider a smart expansion of the H2Ohio program: **support for dam removal and modification**. Ohio has hundreds of obsolete low head dams that pose safety risks, degrade water quality, and stifle recreation. Removing or modifying these structures is a fiscally sound way to restore rivers, reduce public liability, and open up new economic opportunities through tourism and outdoor access.

These projects often have strong local support but no consistent state funding mechanism. H2Ohio could help fill that gap—**multiplying its return on investment** by improving safety, boosting recreation, and enhancing water quality all at once.

In closing, I respectfully ask:

- **Restore full funding to H2Ohio**, with strong support for the Ohio Department of Agriculture and wetland restoration efforts.
- **Support efforts to leverage Farm Bill conservation dollars**, bringing millions of federal dollars into Ohio.
- **Consider targeted funding for dam removal**, addressing both water quality and economic opportunity.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to Ohio's future. I welcome your questions.