

May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

The Honorable Jerry C. Cirino, Chairman

Senate Finance Committee Ohio Senate

Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting specific provisions in House Bill 96.

I'd like to provide written testimony to support the maintenance of the Governor's budget allocation for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, the Buckeye State Tree Nursery, as well as the restoration of the H2Ohio budget to the Governor's requested level.

The Division of Forestry is responsible for the conservation and development of forests with Ohio. That includes far more acreage than just what is within the confines of state forest boundaries. This responsibility extends to the 85% of Ohio's woodland that is privately owned. The Division of Forestry provides many public services including but not limited to providing localized forestry education for Ohio's public, administering cost share programs to aid in quality conservation on private land, and operating the Ohio Forest Tax Law Program, further incentivizing landowners to manage their forests sustainably.

Recently, ODNR reopened the Zanesville tree nursery - about 20 years after it originally closed. Renamed the Buckeye State Tree Nursery, this arm of the Division of Forestry seeks to bring local native tree seedling production back to Ohio. The need for quality native seedlings is high. As a consulting forester who works with landowners, I often see the lack of availability of seedlings for Ohio landowners who wish to convert their property back to forest. Many of us, both professional foresters and landowners alike, are excited about the future that the Buckeye Tree Nursery holds for Ohio's landowners, the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation program, and the H2Ohio water quality Program. Without the support from the Division of Forestry, these programs would fall apart.

I would like to voice my support for the Governor's budget allocation for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, the Buckeye State Tree Nursery, as well as the restoration of the H2Ohio budget to the Governor's requested level.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 96's impact on Ohio's forests and the public.

Elliot Smith

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