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May 30, 2025

To Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Heather Elmer and I am the Executive Director at Chagrin River Watershed Partners. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on Substitute House Bill 96 and share information regarding the importance of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' H2Ohio Grant Program. Specifically, I ask that you restore full funding for the H2Ohio Program as it was presented in Governor DeWine's proposed fiscal year 2026-2027 operating budget.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources' wetland restoration, nutrient capture, and preservation work supported through the H2Ohio Grant Program has prevented up to 186,000 estimated pounds of phosphorus pollution entering our waterways statewide. The program also reconnects streams and rivers to their floodplains, which slows floodwaters and reduces flooding and erosion impacts to communities. The H2Ohio Rivers Program also cleaned up nearly 200 miles of river in its first year, removing 420,000 pounds of trash from the state's waterways. Northeast Ohio has benefitted from several successful H2Ohio-funded projects, including a \$2.2 million investment at Daniels Park in the City of Willoughby (Lake County) which removed failing dam remnants from the Chagrin River, stabilized eroding riverbanks, and protected 78 acres of important riparian corridor along the river. H2Ohio projects have also benefitted many other communities across the region, including wetland restorations in Geauga County and stream restorations in Cuyahoga County.

Cuts to the H2Ohio program in the state budget will greatly impact ODNR's ability to fund wetland and river conservation projects like this which also protect Lake Erie, Ohio's greatest natural asset and one of the world's largest freshwater fisheries. Lake Erie is the drinking water source for 11 million people and driver of \$17.2 billion in tourism in Ohio's eight coastal counties. We urge you to restore full funding for the H2Ohio program to support ODNR's important restoration, nutrient capture, and preservation work.

Thank you again, Chairman Cirino and members of the Finance Committee, for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Best regards,

Sincerely,

Heather Elmer
Executive Director