

May 29, 2025

The Honorable Jerry C. Cirino
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
Ohio State Senate
Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4275
Subject: Testimony in Support of H2Ohio Program's Funding

Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. I am the Senior Policy Director for Audubon Great Lakes, a regional office of the National Audubon Society, which was founded in 1905 and is dedicated to the conservation and protection of birds and their habitats. On behalf of our 54,200+ members in Ohio, I urge you to restore the nearly 45% cut to the H2Ohio program made in the House's budget. It will hurt efforts to improve the quality of our water that Ohioans and our wildlife depend on.

As you are aware, the H2Ohio program funds projects to ensure safe and clean water in Lake Erie and throughout Ohio. To date, over 16,000 acres of wetland have been created, restored or enhanced statewide.

Ohio has benefitted greatly from wetland restoration in several ways. Wetlands reduce nutrient runoff that enters Ohio's waterways and, in turn, reduce harmful algal blooms that negatively impact drinking water and recreational opportunities. Just one acre of wetland can filter 7.3 million gallons of water per year to keep our water clean and can store approximately one million gallons of water, helping to address the damaging and costly issue of flooding. Wetlands also provide important habitat that vulnerable birds like the state-endangered American Bittern need to survive.

The growth of our state's population and successful economic development will increase demand for clean, accessible water. Losing wetlands means less access to water for birds and people throughout the state. Wetlands play an important role in refilling aquifers, underground reservoirs of freshwater that help meet many of the state's water needs. This includes drinking water, agriculture, food production, industrial operations, stormwater and

wastewater management and outdoor recreation, among many others.

The H2Ohio program has, since 2019, enjoyed broad bipartisan support and deserves to be fully funded. H2Ohio has made crucial investments to improve the water quality in our state. Long-term commitment is necessary to address the threats that Ohio's lakes and rivers face. Please fully fund the program at the level requested by the Governor.

Audubon Great Lakes looks forward to working with you to ensure the restoration of funding to this successful program. If you require further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Marnie Urso
Senior Policy Director
Audubon Great Lakes