

DATE: 6 June 2025  
TO: Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
FROM: Loren E. Babcock, Ph.D.  
RE: Testimony Regarding State Budget Planning, Fiscal Years 2026–2027

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you. I am a Professor in the School of Earth Sciences at The Ohio State University. I am not here in an official capacity, and the observations and opinions expressed are my own. They are, however, influenced by my academic work.

I want to express my support for the provision in Governor DeWine's and the Ohio House's original version of the state budget (H.B. 96), which would increase the percentage of oil and gas severance taxes credited to the Geological Mapping Fund (Fund 5110), from 10% to 14%, and decrease the percentage to the Oil and Gas Well Fund (Fund 5180), from 90% to 86%. As I understand it, restoring this provision to the Senate version of the bill will not have any negative impact on ODNR's Division of Oil and Gas or its programs; and it will allow the Division of Geological Survey to continue its critical mission of geological mapping in the State, with all of its important benefits, among them providing geologic support to the Division of Oil and Gas and varied industries including oil and gas, aggregates and rock products, mineral exploration, and groundwater.

Why is this important? The reason is that geologic mapping forms the foundation for understanding the locations and distribution of rock and soil formations, as well as water resources, at and below the Earth's surface. This information is necessary to sustain industries that rely on geologic information, and some of these such as oil and gas and rock products, number among Ohio's most significant economic drivers. In recent years, the search for critical or strategic minerals has become important. In order to remain competitive in the search for strategic mineral resources, Ohio needs geologic mapping to help identify likely sources. The need for clean, sustainable groundwater resources in this State is well understood. Mapping provides us with critical information about potential geologic hazards such as earthquakes and landslides in the State of Ohio. Although people are often unaware of it, our dependence on geologic mapping is extraordinary. I cannot stress enough how important it is to our economy and our general welfare.

From the very earliest days, geologic exploration and mapping in the State of Ohio was spurred largely by economic and scientific interests. Today, every citizen of the State benefits directly or indirectly from the Survey's geologic mapping. In my work, I use the products of geologic mapping on essentially a daily basis. I am concerned largely with making scientific advances that contextualize our place in the world and provide benefit to current and future generations. And I am concerned with training people who will become scientific, industry, or government leaders in the years to come. The Ohio Geological Survey's geologic mapping program underlies all studies of the geology of the State, and these, just like the mapping itself, continue to accrue public benefits that will extend years and decades into the future. Geologic mapping is essential for the training of upcoming generations in the technical skills needed for responsible resource exploration, extraction, and utilization, and for balancing extractive measures with responsible stewardship of our environment. Geologic mapping provides little strain on public budgets and yet reaps rewards that greatly exceed the initial investment. I ask you to please restore the provision for an increase in oil and gas severance taxes credited to the Geologic Mapping Fund to the State budget bill.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Loren E. Babcock", enclosed in a rectangular box.

Loren E. Babcock