

To: Members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Date: June 4, 2025

RE: Opponent testimony on Ohio Department of Natural Resources Budget Provisions

Members of the Committee,

My name is Brian Currie and I am a Professor in the Department of Geology and Environmental Earth Science at Miami University in Oxford. I have taught and conducted geoscience research at Miami for over 25 years. In addition, for over a decade, my students and I have worked in close collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey on projects related to both the oil and gas industry and groundwater resources here in Ohio.

I am testifying today because I recently learned of changes to the oil and gas severance tax allocation that will greatly impact the Geological Survey Geological Mapping Fund.

In particular, I encourage the members of the Committee to restore the provisions recently omitted from the House version of HB 96 that increases the percentage of oil and gas severance taxes credited to the Geological Mapping Fund to 14%, and decreases the percentage to the Oil and Gas Well Fund to 86% [Am. Sub. H.B. No. 96, Page 4410].

Based on my discussions with the ODNR colleagues, retaining these provisions will not negatively impact the Division of Oil and Gas or its programs. Restoring the allotments, however, will allow the Division of Geological Survey to provide continuing geologic support to the Division of Oil and Gas, and produce deliverables used by oil and gas industry professionals here in Ohio. Importantly, these allotment changes will also allow the Geological Survey to meet both current and future challenges related to natural resource utilization in the state.

My interest in this matter comes from my use of geologic maps as a geology student, industry professional, researcher and educator over the past 40 years. Geologic maps are important because they are often the first reference tools used by geoscientists when tackling new problems. They are used to predict the nature of earth materials, identify potential geological hazards, and document the distribution of natural resources at the ground surface and deep into the subsurface.

For example, based on my past experience, geological maps created by the Ohio Division of Geological Survey have been used by geoscientists working on problems as diverse as locating potential high-yield aquifers for municipal water supplies, developing new aggregate quarries, predicting the oil and gas potential of shale formations, identifying subsurface reservoirs for future CO₂ sequestration, and documenting the presence and concentration of critical minerals, to name a few. At the same time, Geological Survey maps are not solely for geologists as they are commonly used by engineering firms, construction companies and municipalities when siting, planning, approving, and executing new development projects.

Another measure of the value of the Geological Survey mapping program is a recent study published by the American Geosciences Institute that examined the economic impact of geologic mapping across the country, including Ohio. The study concluded that the value of geological maps as communicated by stakeholders (which included private and public users) is 7–10 times the actual cost of map construction. This, however, is likely an underestimation in their overall societal value, as the study assumes that maps generated by others would be of the same quality as those produced by entities like our Division of Geological Survey. It is easy

to imagine the myriad of issues that might arise, and project dollars wasted, if the geology of an area is improperly defined. I can confidently state that without the Survey staff's background in Ohio geology and their demonstrated mapping abilities, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for their work to be replicated by others.

While the Geological Survey has been making maps in Ohio for almost 200 years, societal demands for natural resources are ever changing. At the same time, the technologies used to delineate resource distribution and abundance are constantly improving. Accordingly, there is a need to expand mapped areas as well as update existing geologic maps in order to meet the needs of the state. As Ohio continues to grow, the demands on the state's natural resources will only increase. The Division of Geological Survey's current mapping program to document those resources will be crucial to encourage and support future development efforts.

For these reasons, I encourage the members of the committee to restore the increases in the percentage of oil and gas severance taxes credited to the Geological Mapping Fund as originally stated in the House version of HB 96.

I thank the members of the Committee for your consideration and would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Currie", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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