Greater Cincinnati Water Works
Tony Searls, Commercial Services Superintendent
S.B. 118 Opponent Testimony
Ohio Senate, Local Government Committee
March 10, 2026

Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony on behalf of Greater Cincinnati Water Works. My name is Tony Searls, and I serve as the Commercial Services Superintendent for our utility.

Greater Cincinnati Water Works supplies water to 240,000 accounts in Southwestern Ohio and Northern Kentucky, representing more than 1.1 million customers. I am testifying to protect the interests of those customers by opposing the current working version of SB 118, which is an unfunded mandate that would increase costs for all customers to provide a benefit for a small segment, landlords of residential property.

GCWW is a large municipal utility with a diverse customer base. Unlike for-profit, investor-owned utilities, municipal utilities do not earn a profit. Our costs are borne by the rate-paying public, and the rates are established based on the actual cost of service. Because of this, we are highly motivated to collect all charges that are due to us as this is how we fund our operations.

We sympathize with the frustration of property owners who are left liable for payment when a tenant doesn't pay a utility bill. This is why GCWW has robust notification procedures including dual billing. If an account becomes delinquent, GCWW provides notice to the landlord and tenant at least five times using bill messages, automated calls and emails; offers payment plan options and referrals to utility assistance programs for the customer; and then may shut off water as a last resort if no payment has been made.

As a result, GCWW rarely needs to resort to assessing delinquent costs as a lien on customer properties — in fact this has happened less than ten times in the last decade.

SB 118 would require GCWW to make significant changes to our operations and systems to comply with requirements of managing billed amounts for tenants separately. Including notices from landlords of a tenant moving out and moving in. Although this iteration of the bill encourages the process of collecting security deposits, this practice will only help in mitigation of the risk for uncollectible past due debt and does not account for the cost of these operations and system changes.

These expenses would occur during a time when utilities are already struggling with rising costs for energy and chemicals for water treatment, compliance with water quality regulations, and replacement costs for aging infrastructure. Additionally, residents across

Ohio already are struggling with affordability issues, and SB 118 will add to their financial burden.

Greater Cincinnati Water Works respectfully requests that this committee does NOT advance this version of SB 118 for all the reasons mentioned above and others discussed by other water utilities. Sb 118 is harmful to Ohio's public water and wastewater utilities, and millions of ordinary Ohioans who would be forced to bear the financial burden.

Thank you.