



Ohio Environmental Council
[Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony - Ohio Senate Bill 643 (Rep. Ardent & Rep. Patterson)
Kristy Meyer - Vice President of Policy, Natural Resources
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Good afternoon Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and members of the committee. My name is Kristy Meyer and I'm the Vice President of Policy for Natural Resources at the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 643 today.

Lake Erie is a source of drinking water for nearly 3 million Ohioans and an economic engine. Tourism alone is a \$40 billion plus industry in Ohio. More than a third of the revenue is generated by 8 counties along Lake Erie and supports more than 120,000 jobs. While algae plagues many waterways across Ohio, Lake Erie is the canary in the coal mine.

Recently the Ohio EPA (OEPA) highlighted the severity of this problem by designating the open waters of western Lake Erie impaired for algae in its most recent water quality report. Similarly, the OEPA published another report highlighting the severity of nutrient loading into the western Lake Erie basin watershed that ultimately fuels the harmful algal blooms. Simply put, this problem is not going away, and we cannot ignore it.

To put our waters back on track, we will need a well-funded plan that can reach the entire western Lake Erie basin watershed, and HB 643 is a step in that direction. The funds laid out in this legislation will assist with several key aspects of Ohio's algal bloom problem. The funding of research will help us further understand this issue. Funding for soil and water conservation districts to assist agricultural producers to develop nutrient management plans and funds for producers to implement best management plans will support efforts to reduce nutrient loadings into Lake Erie. The specification that the Soil and Water Phosphorus Program funds be targeted towards the "hot spot" watersheds will ensure the most return on the state's investment. This provision will allow the funding to be used in the areas that are identified as the highest contributors for nutrient loading.

HB 643 takes a well-rounded, short-term approach to providing further resources to fight harmful algal blooms. Much more will need to be done in the coming months to truly set Ohio on track to meet our phosphorus reduction goals and rid Lake Erie of its impairment status. I am hopeful HB 643 can be a building block for such action. We thank Rep. Ardnt and Rep. Patterson for their continued leadership on this issue, and introducing HB 643. Chairman Oelslager, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.