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HJR 14 Testimony

State and Local Government

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Committee. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Joint Resolution 14.

This resolution would fund sewer and water capital improvements through general obligation bonds. Under this proposal, municipal corporations, counties, townships, and other government entities would be eligible to receive state bonds for capital projects to ensure clean drinking water, promote public health, and alleviate environmental concerns.

We began working on this issue in 2015 after a massive fish kill in the Youngstown's Mill Creek Metroparks led to parks' watersheds being closed. They were closed due because an outdated sewer overflow system dumped thousands of gallons of raw sewage into the park. Youngstown has a long-term plan to fix this sewer overflow problem, but it lacks the money to complete this fix in a timely manner. Due to money, the project will not be able to be completed until at least 2033.

Unfortunately, this situation is not unique. Water quality issues have been well documented in every corner of our state, from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. These threats to our drinking water are often the result of antiquated and insufficient sewer and water systems. Unlike pothole-filled roads and crumbling bridges that are easy to see, our underground infrastructure often goes unnoticed by the general public.

A lack of proper water infrastructure is not an issue that is new to Ohio. In 1853 Cleveland City Council first authorized \$400,000 for bonds for the development of a centralized public water system (now Cleveland Water) to ensure safe and accessible water for all residents. Improvements have been continually made to this centralized system such as new tunnels in 1869 to deal with Lake Erie pollution and chlorine treatment to eradicate typhoid and cholera in 1911. However, Cleveland has not seen

massive water main replacements since 1985. Since, such projects are becoming less frequent due to the heavy cost.

With the lack of available funding streams, Ohio communities are faced with the often-impossible task of maintaining a vast network of deteriorating underground infrastructure. It is necessary for our state to make this crucial investment to ensure the public safety and welfare of Ohioans. HJR 14 will help alleviate the financial burdens of local residents who are currently being asked to fund the majority of these needed improvements. The passage of this bill could be the difference in how quickly projects can move forward and the timetable in which they are completed. This resolution is not the entire solution to our underground infrastructure needs, but it would be a significant improvement.

According to an assessment by the American Society of Civil Engineer's, Ohio needs to invest \$12.2 billion for drinking water and \$14.6 billion for wastewater infrastructure improvements over the next 20 years to keep in line with water quality and public health standards. This makes for a total of \$26.8 billion in needed investments.

If Ohio voters approve the resolution, the General Assembly would be able to authorize up to \$100 million each fiscal year over a ten-year period for sewer and water capital improvements, for a total investment of \$1 billion. Not only is there tremendous demand for these grants, it is important to note that the requested amount is fiscally responsible. HJR 14 will still keep us well below our constitutionally mandated debt cap of 5%. I envision this grant program will work similar to the successful State Capital Infrastructure Program within the Ohio Public Works Commission.

As public officials, we have an obligation to ensure the continued deliverance of clean drinking water to our constituents. These additional capital dollars will ensure that our constituents have clean drinking water, reduce environmental hazards, and protect our natural resources. These are all issues that we cannot fall behind on to ensure a high quality of life for Ohio residents. Furthermore, additional resources will create jobs in members' districts and improve the economic welfare of people in this state.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss House Joint Resolution 14. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.