

COMMA

Central Ohio Mayors & Managers Association

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May 19, 2017

Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Senate Building

1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor

Columbus, OH 43215

(614) 466-0626

Re: Written testimony in Opposition to Language in Substitute House Bill 49 Imposing Local Government Fund Penalties on the City of Columbus and Creating a new Area-Wide Wastewater Treatment Planning Agency for Central Ohio, Before the Senate Finance Committee

Dear Chairman Oelslager:

The Central Ohio Mayors and Managers Association (COMMA) is opposed to the Substitute House Bill 49 language which imposes local government fund penalties on the City of Columbus and creates a wastewater treatment planning agency for Central Ohio.

Current COMMA members include the Cities of Bexley, Canal Winchester, Columbus, Delaware, Dublin, Gahanna, Grandview Heights, Grove City, Hilliard, New Albany, Pickerington, Powell, Reynoldsburg, Upper Arlington, Westerville, Whitehall and Worthington.

The current system works well and our communities have been well-served for many years. These proposed changes will have a detrimental effect on our individual cities. It is our hope the Ohio Senate removes this unconstitutional provision. Our region continues to grow and be a shining example of regional cooperation because of, not in spite of, current water and sewer policies.

If the City of Columbus is not permitted to charge different water or sewer rates, Columbus will no longer be able to provide COMMA members with full service contracts but rather require master meter contracts. This will force our communities to spend enormous amounts of capital dollars on water tanks and pump stations and pay for the maintenance of these expensive facilities. Our members will also need to hire additional staff (or hire outside companies) to maintain lines, read meters, perform billing and provide customer service. We simply don't have the resources to accomplish this nor do we want to. The current extra fees we pay to the City of Columbus will be dwarfed by the new expenditures and exposure we will face with these proposed changes.

The proposed changes will also prohibit Columbus from requiring annexation in return for services. Again, this will have a negative impact on our COMMA members. We will be forced to provide services to townships without annexation agreements and we will lose control of our growth policies. It has been long and well established law in Ohio that municipalities may require annexation in exchange for

the extension of utilities. We are very concerned that passage of HB 49 will lead to other legislative or judicial curbs to this authority for other municipalities in the state and is an unfair restriction to place on any single city.

Finally, it is important to remember Columbus water and sewer rates are not arbitrary. Other Ohio cities such as Cleveland and Cincinnati also use tiered rate structures to determine costs of delivering services beyond their city limits. This legislation only targets Columbus which is the state leader in regional cooperation and growth.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide written opposition to Substitute H.B. 49. While not perfect, the current system has worked well. These proposed changes will be disastrous for our communities.



Bexley Mayor Ben Kessler
COMMA Chairman