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Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

**OHIO SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY – SUB. H.B. 74**

March 23, 2021

Cory Noonan
Allen County Commissioner

Good morning, Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, and Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. My name is Cory Noonan, and I am in my third term as Allen County Commissioner. I am also the Chairman of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) Jobs, Economic Development, and Infrastructure Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views on House Bill 74, the state transportation budget. I am here today on behalf of Allen County and CCAO to express support for the increased force account limits proposed in the substitute version of the bill.

CCAO members believe that the quality of our infrastructure has a tremendous impact on the economic development potential of our state. Our constituents expect us to be good stewards of their tax dollars and to use public resources in the most efficient manner possible. For many years, state law has recognized that certain projects can be done more efficiently and effectively without resorting to competitive bidding. In order to accomplish this policy goal, projects with estimated costs below certain thresholds are exempt from competitive bidding. For counties, these thresholds, or “force account limits,” are \$30,000 per mile for road work and \$100,000 per mile for bridges (R.C. 5543.19). Unfortunately, these limits were established in 2003 and have not been adjusted since, despite significant increases in construction inflation. Under the bill, the limits would increase to \$150,000 per mile for road work and \$300,000 per mile for bridges.

Working with our County Engineer, we understand the increased costs to maintain the vital infrastructure for our residents, schools, agriculture, retail and manufacturing. During the last 3 years, we have increased our license plate \$5.00 permissive fees two times and testified during the previous state transportation budget for an adjustment to the gas tax. These are important, but yet very limited dollars to address the significant road and bridge work needed. We must be able to use these public dollars in a way to



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address the large needs as the costs continue to rise. Undoubtedly, a significant amount of projects will be completed above the thresholds proposed in this legislation. But making this adjustment will undeniably allow our County Engineer and staff address a significantly large portion of the smaller projects that are vitally needed.

One example, of our 377 bridges in Allen County, 42 are rated in some way which is restricting traffic flow. Under current law, our County Engineer, through the force account, can only work on 7% of these structures. With the adjustment being proposed in this legislation, our Engineer would be able to address 43% through the force account, allowing for 57% of these project to still need to be bid.

Allen County and CCAO believe that the changes in the bill are long overdue, and we urge the committee to keep them in the bill. In addition, we urge the committee to adjust the thresholds annually for construction inflation. Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.