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**Senate Ways and Means Committee
Senate Bill 19—Sponsor Testimony
Tuesday February 2, 2021**

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 19.

Senate Bill 19 contains a policy that I introduced as an amendment last general assembly, but that bill did not cross the finish line. Essentially, all this bill will do is codify the current and historical practice of a property tax exemption for property used for wetland mitigation projects.

Going back to the federal “no net loss” of wetlands policy initiated under President George H. W. Bush, wetland mitigation projects have routinely been handed over to park districts or natural resource non-profit organizations without property tax liability. However, a recent local court decision in an Ohio county allowed for property taxes to be charged on these projects. This legislation will clarify existing laws of the land to make it clear that sites owned by conservation organizations and protected with conservation easements are not subject to property taxes.

The addition of property taxes, more so than anything else, hurts economic development and job creation in our state. If counties decide that they can charge property taxes on protected wetlands, we drastically will hurt any development that would normally occur in these areas. Furthermore, ODOT is the largest single user of mitigation services in the state. Escalating costs of compensatory mitigation to offset this erroneously applied interpretation of the existing tax exemption code will result in significant additional expenses being passed on to ODOT at a time when ODOT resources are scarce.

This bill is a simple codification of something that has been routinely practiced for decades and has zero fiscal impact to state or local governments. The Ohio Home Builders Association has come out in support of this bill.

Thank you once again Chairman Blessing and members of the committee for the opportunity to present this legislation to you today. I will be glad to answer any questions at this time.