

**State Representative David Leland**

**State Representative Kristin Boggs**

**Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 29**

Chairman Landis, Vice Chairwoman Hagan, Ranking Member O’Brien, and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony this afternoon on House Bill 29, legislation that will repeal Section 743.50 of the Revised Code, which enacted in the 131st General Assembly, allows residents who own property around municipal water sources to alter the government-owned land encircling the water.

In effect, this law would place the quality of the public’s drinking-water in the hands of residents who live around those bodies of water.  It gives those residents the authority to prioritize the aesthetics of the buffer zones over their ability to fulfill their sole purpose—to effectively protect a vital public resource.

Prior to this change, buffer zones, or strips of land, owned by the municipalities, between a homeowner’s property and a reservoir, were in place to protect the safety of a water supply that was used by millions of Ohioans. Here in Columbus, we rely on forested and vegetative buffers to protect the drinking water in our three reservoirs: Hoover, O’Shaughnessy and Griggs. These strips acted as filters to keep fertilizer or other chemicals used by the homeowner from leeching into the Reservoir…and our drinking water. This Legislation would restore the municipalities’ ability to maintain these natural buffer zones, thereby ensuring that our water supplies will be protected.

We are all too aware of the problems Ohio has faced in the last couple of years regarding the safety of our drinking water. In fact, it was not too long ago, in June of 2015 to be exact, when the very water that we use here in Capital Square was contaminated by nitrates and deemed unsafe for certain populations.

Fortunately, a lawsuit filed by some of the affected cities, Columbus, Westerville, Akron, Barberton and Lima, has temporarily blocked the law from taking effect— but since we created the problem—we need to take this action to protect the health and safety of our constituents.

Each of us knows that the legislative process works best when accompanied by a vetting process, which involves facilitating discussion and review by our peers, stakeholders, and the public. That simply did not happen here; this provision was inserted into the state’s last biennial budget at the last minute without public input or participation.

We have another chance now, through HB 29, to do the right thing. We respectfully ask that you join us in reaffirming our commitment to protecting water quality in Ohio by repealing this law, and voting favorably upon House Bill 29.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.