

Senate Bill 2
Proponent Testimony
Karl R. Gebhardt, Executive Director, Ohio Lake Erie Commission
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
February 22, 2017

Chairman Balderson, Vice Chairman Jordan, Ranking Minority Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I'm Karl Gebhardt, Executive Director of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission. I am here today in support of SB 2, especially the provisions relative to the Lake Erie Commission. I would like to thank Senator Hite as lead sponsor on this bill.

The Lake Erie Commission was established for the purpose of preserving Lake Erie's natural resources, protecting the quality of its waters and ecosystem, and promoting economic development and tourism. Members of the Commission include the directors of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Departments of Transportation, Health, Development Services, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, plus five additional public members appointed by the Governor. The commission maintains a staff of 2.75 FTE. The Commission maintains an office in the ODNR Coastal Management building in Sandusky and a commission program specialist works out of Ohio EPA's Bowling Green office.

SB 2 updates the Lake Erie Commission's role and processes to address the issues of Lake Erie. The Commission is guided by the *Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Strategy*, which has identified twelve priority issues on which the member state agencies and other partners will focus their attention. Through the changes proposed in SB2, the Lake Erie Commission can be an even more effective catalyst in helping Ohio meet its commitments under the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to reduce phosphorus in Lake Erie's Western Basin, expand efforts to identify and support programs to enable the beneficial use of dredged materials, address the threat of new invasive species, promote economic development and tourism with local governments and focus on applied research, programs and demonstration projects funded through the Lake Erie Protection Fund. The Commission is well suited to provide better coordination of programs and funding between local, state, federal and even international partners on issues related to Lake Erie.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate your support for Lake Erie and would asked for your support of SB 2.