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Committees:

- Finance – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Agriculture
- Energy and Natural Resources
- Finance – General Government & Agency Review Subcommittee
- Government Oversight and Reform
- Judiciary

Before the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Senate Bill 53 – Banning Oil & Gas Drilling Under Lake Erie
Sponsor Testimony by Senator Michael J. Skindell
February 22, 2017

Chairman Balderson, Vice Chair Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on SB 53. I introduced this bill in the 131st General Assembly as SB 46, in the 130th General Assembly as SB 87, and in the 129th General Assembly as SB 78. This bill would codify a ban on the taking or removing of oil or natural gas from under the bed of Lake Erie. Doing so ensures that one of our state's greatest assets is thoroughly protected from the potential dangers of drilling for oil and natural gas.

The 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is one of many accidents that have happened while drilling for oil and natural gas. The effects of even a small-scale accident like this would be devastating for our state. In addition to the environmental damage, the state would see lost revenue of a great magnitude and many lost jobs. The cost of clean-up would be a great burden for the federal, state and local governments and the citizens they represent.

Lake Erie is a vital part of our state and its impact is felt beyond just the Northeast Ohio area. The lake provides a great ecosystem which drives millions of dollars in tourism, fishing, shipping and agriculture. It is estimated that tourism alone brings in around \$430 million in state tax revenue. Therefore, it is essential to protect this state treasure from potentially disastrous conditions.

Although Congress enacted legislation at the federal level to ban this practice in the Great Lakes in 2005, the law is under attack by critics of it. Therefore, legislation banning drilling under Lake Erie at the state level is essential to ensure this environmental protection.

Current law authorizes the Director of Natural Resources, with the approval of the Director of Environmental Protection, the Attorney General and the Governor, subject to certain requirements, to issue permits and create leases to parties applying for permission to take and remove sand, gravel, stone, and other minerals or substances from and under the bed of Lake Erie. This bill would create an exception to this authority by prohibiting the Director of Natural Resources from issuing any permit or making any lease to take or remove oil or natural gas from or under the bed of Lake Erie.

This bill puts an essential safeguard in place for Lake Erie. Chairman Balderson, Vice Chair Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I would be happy to answer any questions relating to this legislation.