



STATE SENATOR  
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**Senate Finance Committee  
Senate Joint Resolution 4  
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Good afternoon Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 4, a resolution that would permit the issuance of state bonds to expand sewer and water improvement projects for municipal corporations, counties, townships, and other government entities.

Unlike pothole filled roads and crumbling bridges that are easy to see, our underground infrastructure often goes unnoticed by the general public until something goes wrong. Today we are at a crossroad. Do we make the necessary investments now or push this issue down the road for the next generation to fix?

From Lake Erie to the Ohio River, water quality issues affect every corner of our state. In fact, every member of this committee can probably think of a water or sewer project in your district that needs funding.

I began working on this issue in 2015 after a massive fish kill at Youngstown's Mill Creek Metro Parks. The cause was an outdated sewer overflow system that dumped thousands of gallons of raw sewage into the park's lakes and streams. This led to high levels of E.

coli that killed the fish and the lakes at Mill Creek were closed for some time.

While the City of Youngstown has a long term-term plan to remedy the sewer overflow problems, the project is not scheduled to begin for a few years and likely will not be completed until 2033. A major reason for this delay is a lack of funding, which is often the case for this type of project.

The situation in Mill Creek is one example of a statewide problem. The most recent report card from the Ohio Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers gives our drinking water a “D+” and waste water systems a “C-.” And the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates our state’s need for investment in wastewater infrastructure is \$14.6 billion, plus an additional \$12.2 billion for capital improvements over twenty years.

With the lack of sufficient resources, both locally and federally, our communities are often faced with the insurmountable task of maintaining and upgrading a vast network of deteriorating underground infrastructure. Therefore, it is necessary for the State to make this crucial investment to protect the health and well being of Ohioans.

If Ohio voters approve this resolution, the General Assembly would be able to authorize up to \$100 million per fiscal year over a 10-year period for sewer and water capital improvements, for a total investment of \$1 billion. SJR4 is fiscally responsible because it will keep us well below our constitutionally mandated debt cap of 5% without raising taxes.

I envision this grant program will work similar to the successful State Capital Infrastructure Program within the Ohio Public Works Commission.

This resolution is not the entire solution to our underground infrastructure needs, but it would be a significant step in the right direction. The passage of SJR4 could be the difference in how quickly projects can move forward and the timetable in which they are completed. In addition, it will create thousands of jobs and improve economic opportunities for the people of Ohio.

Senate Joint Resolution 4 has bipartisan co-sponsors and it has received positive feedback from groups and organizations concerned about protecting our drinking water and Ohio's lakes and streams. The resolution also has the support of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown.

The General Assembly has made progress in addressing the regulatory side of our water quality issues, but that is only part of the equation. It is time to shift our focus to meaningful investments into upgrading our infrastructure so our citizens have access to clean drinking water and can enjoy our lakes and parks in the future.

Chairman Oelslager and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Senate Joint Resolution 4. I would be happy to answer any questions members may have at this time.