



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 36

February 27, 2017

The Honorable John Eklund, Chair
Senate Ways & Means Committee
1st Floor, Senate Building
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Senator Eklund:

The Nature Conservancy is a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Established in Ohio in 1959, we work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, government and local communities to develop pragmatic, market-based solutions to conservation challenges. More than 55,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio supports Senate Bill 36, sponsored by Senator Cliff Hite. While this legislation makes changes to the overall formula for agricultural land tax valuation, our organization is supportive based on the provisions related to conservation practices. SB 36 places lands utilized for conservation practices or enrolled in federal conservation programs for a minimum of three years at the minimum value. Current practice discourages farmers and landowners from engaging in various conservation practices because land not in agricultural use is taxed at the same rate as land that is producing crops and providing income.

We know that the vast majority of our state's farmers are committed to responsible stewardship of their land and adjacent waterways to help conserve and protect our natural resources. We are encouraging farmers all over the state to put in place grass buffer strips and other conservation practices to help reduce phosphorus runoff, which feeds harmful algal blooms. To do this, land must be taken out of production, yet under the existing CAUV is taxed as if the property was indeed producing. We know that, with a combination of Ohio's regulations and additional voluntary measures such as the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program, which recently expanded state-wide, the state can make strides to reduce the flow of agricultural nutrients into our streams, rivers and lakes. These measures are needed to achieve the state's commitment to improved water quality and to a 40% reduction of nutrients into Lake Erie by 2025. SB 36 is another tool in the tool box for our state to reach those important goals.

Passing this piece of legislation will benefit farmers and agricultural landowners who choose to do the right thing to protect our waterways. This, in turn, benefits all Ohioan's who rely

on clean, safe waterways for drinking water, food production, swimming, fishing and boating and other uses. We ask for the prompt consideration and favorable report of Senate Bill 36 in the Senate Ways & Means Committee to the full Senate.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have on this piece of legislation.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracy S. Freeman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Tracy S. Freeman
Government Relations Director

Cc: *Senator Cliff Hite*
Jenna Beadle, Ohio Farm Bureau Association