



**Senator Sandra Williams
21st Ohio Senate District
Senate Bill 193 Sponsor Testimony
Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee
March 29, 2022**

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 193.

The purpose of this legislation is to prohibit municipalities from imposing water and sewers liens on properties. This legislation ends the draconian policy of placing liens on properties with overdue water and sewer bills. In some cases the water bills are accurate, however in a significant number of cases there have been bill glitches, over charges and a faulty process for contesting the bills. This practice, outlined in Ohio Revised Code Section 743.04, allows every municipality in the state to use the practice of water and sewer liens. However recent news reports have shown that the practice of water liens is widely used in the Cleveland water and sewer service territory. Ohio Law simply allows liens to be placed, there is no minimum dollar amount that the customer must owe or length of time the customer has to be in the arrear. In Cleveland, for example, water bills as low as \$300 has been sent to the county auditor for a water lien. More than 11,000 water liens were placed on properties between 2014 and 2018. While customers requested hearings through the Cleveland Water Review Board, few hearings were

held. For example, in 2018, 207 hearings were requested but only 33 were held, 28% received no relief—26% received a payment plan with no adjustment.

Another issue with ORC 743.04, in addition to the fact that it allows delinquent water charges to be certified with the county auditor, is that the notice to the property owner does not need to be certified. Notices are sent through the United States Postal Service and may or may not make it to the homeowner.

As members of the Legislature, we have a responsibility to protect our residents and ensure that economically vulnerable citizens are not further burdened by the inability to pay for essential services. Senate Bill 193 is that protection and I ask for your favorable consideration. Chair McColley and members of the committee this completes my testimony for Senate Bill 193. I will be happy to answer any questions.