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Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chair Santucci, Ranking Member Upchurch, and my colleagues on the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, thank you for allowing me to offer sponsor testimony on HB 469, which would create the Ohio River Commission.

The Ohio River is undoubtedly one of Ohio's most valuable assets. It stretches 981 miles from Pennsylvania to Illinois with an average depth of 24 feet. The river is a part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and was used by many early Americans as an effective way to bring their family and possessions into the Northwest territory. From the beginning of record-keeping in 1917 to today, commercial traffic has increased from 5 million tons of cargo to over 230 million tons. Creation of the Ohio River Commission will allow the State of Ohio to protect and utilize an essential cultural and commercial asset to maximize the benefit to all Ohioans.

The idea for this bill came from the Ohio River Coalition of Ohio (ORCO), which initially was formed in 2019, and includes representation from Columbiana County, where I am from, as well as entities from counties south all along the Ohio River.

For example, the Columbiana County Port Authority, led by Executive Director Penny Traina conducts business on the Ohio River. Penny and her team operate the Port Authority's state-of-the-art Intermodal Facility in Wellsville, Ohio, one of 15-cargo terminals on the Ohio River.

The Port Authority Directors, economic development specialists, and tourism groups along the Ohio River all do their part to bring awareness to the rivers' importance to our economy. The creation of the Ohio River Commission would oversee the business conducted on the Ohio River, from tourism to cargo transportation.

HB 469 creates the Ohio River Commission within the Department of Development to promote economic development, marine cargo terminal operations, and travel and tourism on the Ohio River and its tributaries. The commission would consist of 11 members: the director of Development (who would chair the committee), the directors of ODNR and ODOT, one member each appointed by the House Speaker and Senate President, and 6 other members appointed by the Governor.

The Ohio River Commission's duties would be many, but, consistent with its aims of promoting prosperity throughout Ohio, here are a few highlights. The Commission would:

- In collaboration with public or private planning organizations, develop a master plan for Ohio River infrastructure and transportation projects;

- Coordinate with port authorities, local development districts, the federal government, and many other interested parties regarding Ohio River Issues;
- Make an annual report to the Legislature regarding commerce on the Ohio River;
- And seek and award grants, seek and issue loans, and utilize other finance mechanisms in support of the Ohio River projects.

The Ohio River Commission will be funded by the Ohio River Commission Fund in the state treasury, which is created by this bill. It also allows the Commission to be funded by appropriate sources of revenue from the Department of Development.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. I am confident that you can see the value this commission would add to the assets of the Ohio River. This commission will benefit the people of Ohio for many years to come. We are happy to answer any questions.