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House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources
House Bill 33 – Interested Party Testimony

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Shelby County Commissioner

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Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Tony Bornhorst; I am in my eleventh year as a Shelby County Commissioner and serve on CCAO Ag and Rural Affairs Committee as the Chairman. I am a farmer, former pork producer, a Past President of the Ohio Pork Producers Council, served on the Shelby County Soil and Water Conservation District Board in the 1980's; I am in my 33rd year as a 4-H Advisor for the Ft. Loramie Livestock 4-H Club which my father started in 1951 and 12 of my 19 grandchildren are already members of.

I am here today on behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) to speak on several key provisions included in House Bill 33 that will strengthen all 88 counties and the state alike.

Soil and Water Conservation

Addressing Ohio's complex water quality challenges requires input and investment from many sources. The federal, state, and local governments along with the agricultural industry all must play a role in protecting Ohio's water resources. For CCAO, improving water quality begins with funding the boots on the ground at Ohio's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). SWCDs provide expert assistance to both agricultural and urban stakeholders in all 88 counties. The boots on the ground is the fundamental key to implement best management practices. They work with the farmer on an individual farm to farm basis to reduce nutrient loss, a key driver of harmful algal blooms.

Counties invest considerable funds to support the work of SWCDs, and it is important that the state likewise support the important work of these entities. CCAO has long supported a 1:1 state-local match for SWCDs, and CCAO is supportive of the \$28.8 million included in the executive budget proposal towards this effort.



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OSU Extension, OARDC & Sea Grant

Ohio State University Extension builds better lives and stronger communities through partnerships and sharing knowledge. It supports Ohio's number one industry, agriculture, and develops future leaders through 4-H youth development. Extension connects the knowledge of the university to Ohioans to benefit their lives, businesses and communities through programming in family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, community development, and agriculture and natural resources.

Extension's 4-H program is a particular point of pride for many counties. Tens of thousands of young Ohioans participate in 4-H in some capacity each year. The leadership and educational skills our young people acquire through 4-H prepare them for healthy and productive lives and help develop the next generation of local leaders.

OARDC, the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center, is the research arm of the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences of The Ohio State University and focuses on scientific disciplines critical to food security, the environment, human health, and pest management. The key to Ohio's competitiveness in the agricultural industry is continued support of innovation through this program. OARDC partners with producers, industry, government and citizens to explore new products and approaches; enhance profitability for agricultural businesses; and to maximize the impact on the health of the environment and human life.

Ohio Sea Grant works to protect Lake Erie's health through research, education, outreach and partnerships. Ohio Sea Grant's Stone Laboratory is an important center of scientific research and education for Lake Erie's toughest environmental challenges. As Ohio continues its fight for a healthier Lake Erie, investment in Ohio Sea Grant is important to furthering this effort.

CCAO supports additional state funding for agricultural and water quality research and Extension to ensure greater numbers of Ohioans have access to this knowledge. Counties invest considerable local funds to support Extension, and it is important that counties have a strong partner in the state to support that effort. Keeping funding levels for OSU Extension, OARDC and Sea Grant to the current funding levels in the current budget bill (HB 33) is a worthwhile investment in Ohio's communities, environment, and economy.

Brownfield Remediation Fund

Within the previous budget, the Brownfield Remediation Fund was created to help provide \$350 million to assess and cleanup these environmentally contaminated sites. We commend the Legislature for the inclusion of this program, and the Ohio Department of Development in its administration of this successful program.

The Brownfield Remediation Fund's \$350 million provided grants to 313 projects in 83 of Ohio's 88 counties. While this is a significant investment in the assessment and cleanup of brownfields, the need remains for grant dollars to remediate and redevelop these blighted brownfields into productive use.

The as-introduced budget does not include funding for the Brownfield Remediation Fund, and therefore, we are here today to encourage the committee to restore The Brownfield Remediation Fund to the previous funding levels of \$350 million within the FY24-25 budget.

The initial investment of \$350 million granted 188 cleanup grants, which is the final step in the remediation process to address environmental contamination and allow these brownfields to become new industrial and commercial sites, new housing, mixed-use space, or developable land.

However, 125 projects were granted assessment dollars, which merely determines the contamination present on the site, but does not provide cleanup dollars to complete the work. Without additional funding, these 125 projects will likely remain contaminated, and unable to move into productive economic engines. The additional investment in funds will allow the 125 projects to compete for cleanup grants.

The final round for applications through ODOD opened and closed in less than 3 business days due to limited funding remaining and an overwhelming amount of applications.

H2Ohio

Improving water quality across the state is a priority for counties, whether it be Lake Erie's Western Basin, the Ohio River or points in between. Over the past two years, H2Ohio has been an important resource to agricultural producers and communities across the state. Over 1.2 million acres of farmland have been enrolled in nutrient best management practices, dozens of wetland projects are underway and hundreds of failing home septic systems and lead service lines have been replaced. All of these actions promote improved water quality for a healthier environment and healthier citizens.

The executive budget proposal provides \$307 million for the H2Ohio Fund. CCAO is pleased to see continued investment in this important program. Ohio's water quality challenges are complex and will require resources paired alongside accountability measures. The investments contained in the H2Ohio Fund provide the necessary funding, guided by leading scientific research, to produce long-term improvements in Ohio's water resources.

Included within the Governor's proposed H2Ohio fund, is the dedication to a newly created program focused on maintaining water quality, protecting wildlife and supporting

economic development within Ohio's river systems. The Governor has named this program the H2Ohio Rivers Initiative, which he has proposed \$58.8 million over the budget.

CCAO supports the agricultural producers who utilize best management practices to reduce nutrient runoff. These producers should be recognized for their efforts to improve water quality, and would like to add that Bornhorst Bros. was recognized in 2000 as a National Pork Industry Environmental Stewardship award winner, one of four farms nationwide, and I am very proud of that recognition.

Farmland Preservation

CCAO is pleased to see the executive budget propose \$8,075,000 for farmland preservation. This investment will keep over 3,500 acres of Ohio farmland in active production while allowing farmers and landowners to invest in their operations and land. This is a good step to keep Ohio's agriculture industry vibrant for future generations to come.

I thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me.