



***Invited Testimony on Ohio EPA's
Assistance Programs***

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Chairman Koehler, Vice-Chair Creech, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the Ohio House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, thank you for inviting me before the committee today to provide some informal remarks on some of Ohio EPA's programs and priorities.

Since 1972, Ohio EPA has fulfilled our important mission of protecting the environment and citizens of Ohio. We do this through many regulatory programs that help ensure that we have clean water, breathe clean air, and are protected from hazards associated with managing wastes, spills, and releases. We have an important role in supporting economic development through efficient permitting processes and helping communities bring old industrial sites back to useful life. Helping keep citizens informed on environmental topics, supporting students through environmental education and conducting outreach to help businesses understand our regulations are also important activities of our Agency.

As a career public servant at Ohio EPA, I've spent many years in both regulatory and non-regulatory programs. For 20 years of my career, I worked in various compliance assistance programs within Ohio, because it is my belief that we have an equally important responsibility to help businesses and communities get access to the tools, information and resources they need to achieve compliance and be successful.

While most people are familiar with the regulatory responsibilities of Ohio EPA, some are not as familiar with the assistance programs we have available to help both businesses and communities through our Division of Environmental and Financial Services (DEFA). I would like to take a few minutes today to highlight these services.

Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) in DEFA provides free and confidential assistance to help small businesses comply with environmental requirements. Services of OCAPP include helping small businesses with

permit applications, completing on-site visits and conducting outreach through training and webinars on a wide variety of environmental compliance topics. The office has an extensive library of publications available to help explain the regulations in easy-to-understand terms.

OCAPP also supports businesses, schools and communities in identifying and implementing practices that can save them money. The office hosts an online Materials Marketplace that businesses can use to find outlets for their recyclable materials and by-products that would otherwise go to a landfill. OCAPP administers a grant program that provides several million dollars a year to communities, organizations and businesses statewide to complete recycling, litter prevention, scrap tire and market development projects. We also have an Encouraging Environmental Excellence Program which recognizes businesses, communities, organizations and schools for their environmental stewardship activities.

Another important function of DEFA is supporting communities in meeting their drinking water and wastewater infrastructure needs. For over 30 years, DEFA has administered two large state revolving loan funds to assist communities in completing infrastructure projects such as:

- improving, expanding and constructing new wastewater treatment and drinking water plants;
- replacing, repairing and constructing sewer and water lines;
- constructing new water towers;
- building tunnels and other infrastructure to eliminate combined sewer overflows;
- replacing lead service lines; and
- replacing failing home septic systems.

The division has project managers, engineers and planning professionals that provide financial and technical assistance to support communities in the planning, design and construction of these projects.

The staff, processes and funding structure within DEFA have been instrumental in successfully administering Ohio EPA's proportion of funding through Governor DeWine's H2Ohio Initiative. Our focus areas under the H2Ohio Initiative include improving drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, especially in economically disadvantaged communities throughout the state. We have also been providing H2Ohio

funding to our local health departments for programs to help homeowners remove and replace failing home sewage treatment systems. In addition, we are focusing our efforts on removing lead service lines and fixtures in daycares.

During State Fiscal Year 20, Ohio EPA distributed H2Ohio funding to support the construction of sewer projects in Miami, Meigs, and Williams counties and drinking water projects in Columbiana, Coshocton, Pike, and Noble counties. Construction is underway for six of these seven projects and we anticipate that three will be completed by the end of 2021.

In terms of outcomes with our first year of H2Ohio funding, on the drinking water side alone, these projects will provide more reliable and safe drinking water to an estimated 4,000 Ohioans. An estimated 180 failing septic systems will be repaired or replaced, and 185 lead service lines will be removed from childcare centers in the Cincinnati area. We've also made small, but important investments to enhance our water quality monitoring network in the Lake Erie basin area and elsewhere in the state and are supporting a technology vetting process to evaluate innovative solutions to help address our water quality challenges.

For State Fiscal Year 21, we are awarding just over \$3 million dollars in H2Ohio funding to support drinking water projects that will serve more than 4,400 Ohioans, and \$4.35 million dollars to support wastewater projects that will serve more than 7,200 Ohioans. In total, we are supporting 13 communities with infrastructure improvements. In addition, we are expanding our focus on home sewage treatment system replacement to 11 counties and working with additional communities to replace lead service lines in daycares.

These H2Ohio investments are important for many reasons. Improving our infrastructure and addressing failing home septic systems reduces pollution that enters our streams, rivers and lakes. In addition, by focusing efforts on our economically disadvantaged areas, in both small and larger communities, we can help them get projects over the finish line that they are not able to fully fund on their own. Finally, having access to better sewer services and reliable, safe drinking water not only improves the quality of life for citizens, but it can also better position these communities for future economic growth and development.

I appreciate the opportunity today to highlight the important resources and services available through our Agency to help businesses and communities throughout Ohio succeed and grow. I have attached a copy of DEFA's 2020 Annual Report to this testimony for more specifics on these resources and services, and I am happy to answer any questions you have at this time.