



April 15, 2021 – Senate Finance Committee

Testimony on H2Ohio

Laurie A. Stevenson, Director

Greetings Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Laurie Stevenson, Director of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Thank you for the invitation to speak to the committee today about Ohio EPA's work under the H2Ohio initiative.

Ohio EPA received H2Ohio funding of \$8.675 million each fiscal year of this current biennium. 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. We are also focusing our efforts on removing lead service lines and fixtures in daycares. I am excited to provide more specifics to you on our accomplishments to date and what we hope to achieve with additional H2Ohio funding.

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

In terms of outcomes with our first year of 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 expect to invest just over \$3 million dollars in H2Ohio funding to support drinking water projects that will serve over 4,400 Ohioans, and \$4.35 million dollars to support wastewater projects that will serve over 7,200 Ohioans. We plan to expand our focus on home sewage treatment system replacement to 11 counties and work with additional communities to replace lead service lines in daycares. We have identified 13 shovel-ready projects and will be releasing additional details on these specific infrastructure project awards very soon.

These H2Ohio investments are so 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 the people, but it can also better position these communities for future economic growth and development.

We are very excited about the opportunities in this upcoming biennium to do even more H2Ohio-related work for more communities throughout Ohio. In FY 22 and FY 23, the proposed portion of H2Ohio funding for Ohio EPA is \$46 million each fiscal year. While this is a significant increase from the current biennium, we know the needs of Ohio's communities for wastewater and drinking water projects are substantial, and we are confident that we can put all of our H2Ohio dollars to work for the benefit of Ohioans. Our approach moving forward will include additional outreach to communities to better understand their needs and explain the process for them to bring their important infrastructure projects forward to the agency for H2Ohio funding consideration.

Expanding our efforts under H2Ohio to make more investments to help Ohio communities would personally be one of my proudest accomplishments during my tenure as the Director of Ohio EPA. Thank you very much for your time today and for your consideration and support of our important objectives under H2Ohio. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.