



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony - Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
Senate Bill 193
Presented to the Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
April 5, 2022**

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and Members of the Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today in support of Senate Bill 193 (HB 193). My name is Melanie Houston and I serve as the Interim Water Director with the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund. I am testifying today on behalf of the OEC Action Fund and the Alliance for the Great Lakes.

At the OEC Action Fund we are committed to protecting and enhancing the environment and the health of all Ohio communities. We fight for Ohioans' access to clean water, healthy air, vibrant public lands and a strong democracy. Our staff are based in Columbus with micro offices across the state.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes is a regional nonprofit organization based in Chicago with 6 offices throughout the Great Lakes region. AGL's Ohio office is based in Cleveland. Alliance works across the region to protect The Great Lakes. They focus on a myriad of issues including agriculture & water, aquatic invasive species, water infrastructure & affordability.

Access to clean and safe drinking water includes making sure that water is affordable for all. Our organizations began working on the issue of water affordability in 2017, after we conducted a number of community conversations where residents emphasized the importance of rising costs for basic water and sewer services.

Water affordability is a growing problem across the country. In 2016, more than 15 million Americans, or 1 out of every 20 households, had their water shut off due to being unable to pay their water bill. It is estimated that by the end of 2022, more than a third of all households across the nation will not be able to pay their water bill. Further, water stresses, and the costs to fix them, are not shared equally.

We wanted to learn more about Ohio's water affordability problem. In November 2019 we partnered with nationally recognized researcher and professor, Dr. Manny Teodoro of the University of Wisconsin - Madison, to conduct a study on Ohio Water and Sewer Affordability.

This report found that:

- In nearly 80% of Ohio communities, a month of basic water and sewer service requires more than eight hours of labor at minimum wage;



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- In about 45% of Ohio communities a household at the 20th income percentile must pay more than 10% of its disposable income for basic water and sewer service; and
- Water affordability in Ohio is not specific to urban, suburban, or rural communities and affordability is strongly correlated with income inequality.

In urban communities, drinking and sewer costs are disproportionately borne by communities of color which have been redlined and disinvested for decades, leading to high income inequality. In turn, basic water and sewer costs are a higher proportion of disposable income. In rural communities, small water utilities cannot reach economies of scale in managing infrastructure, which results in higher costs. Lower income rural residents end up paying a higher proportion of their income for basic water and sewer services.

Conclusion

In summary, families across Ohio are already being asked to make unimaginable tradeoffs to pay their increasing water and sewer bills. The last thing that a family needs is for a water bill crisis to turn into the loss of a home. A home represents not only emotional safety, security and stability for parents and children-alike but it is also a tool for building wealth and financial security for future generations.

We stand in support of SB193 and thank Senator Williams for her leadership in this important step to protect Ohioans from the stress associated with the inability to pay a water or sewer bill.

Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for considering our perspective and input. I would be happy to answer any questions if you have them.

Melanie Houston
Interim Water Director
Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
mhouston@theoec.org

Crystal M.C. Davis
Vice President of Policy & Strategic Engagement
Alliance for the Great Lakes
cdavis@greatlakes.org