



OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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Sub. HB 23 Transportation Budget Interested Party Testimony March 7, 2023 Senate Transportation Committee

Madam Chair, members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Heidi M. Fought, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Township Association (OTA). Thank you for allowing me to testify this afternoon on Sub. House Bill 23, the Transportation Budget.

There are many positive items included in HB 23 that will directly or indirectly benefit townships. We support the language:

- requiring ODOT, in collaboration with the Department of Development and the Governor's Officer of Workforce Transportation, to conduct a statewide study of the Ohio Transportation system;
- authorizing a township that benefits from but is not a member of a Transportation Improvement District (TID) to make an appropriation to the TID in support of efforts; and
- allocating \$1 billion to the Rural Highway Fund of which 20% is to matching local projects.

I would like to mention a couple items within Sub. HB 23 to which the OTA is in opposition. First, included in the substitute bill is a change to township zoning regarding aggregate mining operations. The bill before the committee requires townships to accept mining operations without recourse. This blanket rule change does not allow a township to make decisions based on their individual situation and what might be in the best interest of their residents. **We respectfully request this language be struck from the bill and be considered in a stand-alone measure.**

The second item that the OTA opposes is the removal of a township's ability to use traffic law photo monitoring devices. Numerous townships utilize these devices to help keep the roads safe. For example, Liberty Township in Trumbull County uses these devices on a daily basis as their officers spend a large amount of time responding to high priority calls near Youngstown and I-80. **We respectfully request this language be struck from the bill and allow communities the flexibility to address safety concerns as they deem appropriate for their residents.**

Lastly, the OTA would like to **express support for an amendment which would increase township force account limits to \$115,000 for maintenance and repair projects and \$45,000 per mile for construction and reconstruction.** As you know, the term "force account" refers to the situation in which a public official is statutorily authorized to act as a contractor on a project and the public body does the work itself, employing its own labor and purchasing its own materials. The limits on force account work (R.C. §5575.01) were last increased in 2003. The current township thresholds are \$45,000 per project for maintenance and repair and \$15,000 per mile for road construction and reconstruction. These limits simply do not reflect the cost of doing business in today's economy.

Records from national highway organizations and from agencies around Ohio show that inflation has doubled nationally for highway construction costs since 2003 and in Ohio those

actual costs have more than doubled. By increasing force account limits for townships, the dollars saved by using local work forces for these smaller projects can then be used to match Ohio Public Works Commission and other funding programs to help get larger projects out to bid.

Townships are mandated by the Ohio Revised Code to maintain roads for the safety and convenience of the traveling public. The dedicated public officials and employees have an obligation to spend taxpayer money wisely. Bidding out projects does not always save money, time or resources - in fact, sometimes it produces the opposite effect. The force account limits were put in place to allow local government officials some flexibility to do their own road work, but to still avoid substantial competition with private businesses. *We are simply requesting that the limits in place today be updated to reflect the current state of the economy and allow townships to utilize their taxpayers' money efficiently and effectively.*

Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the committee members may have.