

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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**BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

May 7, 2025

Washington, D.C.

Good morning, Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share Ohio's perspective on the reauthorization of U.S. EPA's Brownfield Program.

Across Ohio and the United States, thousands of former industrial and commercial sites sit idle, tainted by environmental contamination. These brownfields become urban blights and contribute to economic decline, public health risks, and neighborhood stagnation.

The brownfield program administered by the U.S. EPA offers a consistent and effective solution. The program facilitates the identification, assessment, cleanup, and reuse of these properties, revitalizing communities and stimulating economic growth.

State and tribal assistance grants are noncompetitive grants authorized under Section 128(a) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act ("CERCLA"), as amended. These grants are the foundation of states' brownfield programs. U.S. EPA allows states flexibility to design their brownfield programs to benefit each state's needs while also providing consistency by requiring that all grantees meet four elements:

1. A survey and inventory of brownfield sites,
2. Oversight and enforcement authorities ensure that cleanups are protective of human health and the environment,
3. Mechanisms for meaningful public participation, and,
4. Mechanisms for approval of cleanup plans, and verification or certification that cleanup is complete.

Within these four elements, the 128(a) funds have a wide variety of uses, including providing funds to complete environmental assessments of properties to meet all appropriate inquiry or voluntary cleanup program requirements, Phase II sampling, and asbestos and lead inspections.

Last federal fiscal year, Ohio funded 20 assessments through our standard allocation and 63 through our supplemental allocation provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

The grant enables the state to incorporate local input into redevelopment planning, including infrastructure evaluations and site re-use assessments. This effort aims to help communities reinvent their lake and riverfronts, main streets, and industrial corridors, creating parks, housing, mixed-use development, and commercial centers to stimulate job creation, tourism, and tax revenues. This community-driven approach ensures that redevelopment serves the people most affected by these long-neglected properties. For example, in Shadyside, Ohio, we are working with the community to develop a Brownfield Vision Plan that includes a brownfield inventory, market study, community outreach, and survey, brownfield site reuse renderings, and a resource roadmap of how to move forward with the selected projects. We recently completed a brownfield vision plan in Bellaire, Ohio, and we are now working on a downtown reuse assessment to create viable reuse scenarios for their downtown corridor.

Our program also supports local officials in preparing grant applications for the competitive brownfield grants providing workshops to further build their capacity to apply for and hold federal grants. For the last round of grant applications, Ohio's program supported 14 communities in applying for their own brownfield grants. These workshops also educate local communities about the many brownfield issues and the incentives that are available at the state and federal level.

We routinely meet with community officials and others to assist them in working through the assessment and cleanup of brownfield properties and provide much-needed grant-funded technical support and recommendations. Last federal fiscal year, Ohio brownfields staff met with 60 communities, gave 12 presentations on brownfield issues, and provided 18 communities with grant-funded technical assistance.

The grant also supports the state's Voluntary Cleanup Programs (VCP), which provide the foundation for setting cleanup goals and implementing institutional controls. In Ohio, our voluntary clean-up program was created in 1994; we call it the Voluntary Action Program. To date, the Voluntary Action Program has achieved clean-up at 750 sites, allowing over 17,000 acres to be reused across Ohio. The grant allows us to fund long-term oversight activities to ensure these sites remain protective of human health and the environment.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided an additional \$50 million through a competitive Community-Wide Assessment Grant for States and Tribes. In federal fiscal year 2022, Ohio was awarded nearly \$2 million to conduct additional assessments. With these additional funds, Ohio's brownfield program has completed another 62 assessments within the award period, for a total of 145 assessments over our 3 grants.

Since 2023, Ohio's 128(a) funds and Community-Wide Assessment Grant have leveraged \$54 million in additional state-funded brownfield assessment and cleanup dollars, and prior

evaluations by U.S. EPA showed that \$20.13 was leveraged for each dollar of EPA brownfield funds spent on assessment and cleanup activities.

The Brownfield program is a great example of how environmental cleanup and economic revitalization are not competing priorities but complementary goals that can help build a stronger future for all Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts today, and I look forward to your questions.