



Board of Commissioners
50 Park Ave. E
Mansfield, OH 44902

June 1, 2017

To: Member of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
From: Marilyn John, Richland County Commissioner
Re: Substitute HB 49 – State Biennial Budget

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Marilyn John and I am a Commissioner from Richland County. Thank you for allowing me to testify today regarding some critical issues contained in Sub House Bill 49 which impact county government.

To those of you who are not familiar with Richland County, we are home to over 121,000 residents in North Central Ohio. Over the past decade, we saw industry come and go along with jobs, unfortunately no different than many counties in the State of Ohio. Recovery from the Great Recession continues to be a struggle at best. Only through the exercise of fiscal responsibility do we continue to provide county services to our residents.

Although I know many counties shared their budget statistics with you, I feel it is important to include ours as well. While our sales tax revenues have increased over the past decade, Richland County's reliance on sales tax revenues has increased by 12 percentage points due to the decrease in all other revenue streams from Local Government Funds (a reduction of over \$1.7 million in the last 10 years) and Investment Income to Real Estate tax and Conveyance fees. Our General Fund expenses in 2016 were \$270,000 below 2007 expenses as evidence of our commitment to fiscal responsibility. If the state is unable to find a solution to the MCO sales tax reduction, Richland County will suffer an annual \$1.5 million loss to our general fund revenues. This along with other pending state budget proposals will cripple our county's ability to provide services to our residents for years to come.

One consequence of the budget crunch is our ability to effectively handle the opiate crisis which is overwhelming our Sheriff's department, jail, coroner and justice system. With over 600 overdoses in our county last year and 63 overdose deaths confirmed; we run short for autopsies every year. Our OD deaths more than doubled in the past 2 years and the cost of an autopsy increased by 44% in the 2 and ½ years since I took office.

While violent crime and gun violence increased in large part due to the opiate crisis, we have had to decrease funding for the Sheriff's Department. The administration of justice is the largest burden on our general fund at over 80%, and the reduction in revenues will further exacerbate our ability to combat this crisis. Just as the Ohio Supreme Court has the ability to court order their budget with you, our courts also have the ability to pursue legal action and indicated a willingness to do so if necessary.

To conclude, the results from slow growth and a legal mandate to operate a solvent budget will necessitate more reductions in services to residents, such as OSU Extension, Richland County Soil and Water, and the Richland County Transit Authority among others. Further reductions in state contributions to Richland County's economy as contained in Sub House Bill 49 will hinder our ability to provide these critical services. These services to our residents, the pursuit of justice, and providing a local economy on solid financial footing are the cornerstones of county governance.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.