

## **Ohio businesses join to create water policy organization**

**Kim Palmer**

A coalition of Ohio companies, business trade groups and nonprofits announced the launch of an advocacy organization created to improve water quality policy in the state.

The [Ohio Water Partnership](#) comprises large and small business organizations "that recognize clean, safe and affordable water is a competitive advantage" for the state's business climate, according to a statement from the group. Coalition members discussed their goals during a news conference on Tuesday, April 20, at the Anheuser-Busch brewery in Columbus.

"There have been a lot of great efforts to focus on water quality here in the state of Ohio," said Jim Samuel, executive director of the Ohio Water Partnership. "But at the end of the day, there was not a long-standing organization there to focus on it from a business standpoint."

Partnership members represent Ohio's key industry sectors and include giants such as [Eaton](#), a Fortune 500 manufacturing company, and smaller businesses such as the [Winking Lizard](#) restaurant chain. Key members of businesses and organizations in agriculture, retail, travel and leisure, energy, health care, construction and professional services also are part of the bipartisan group.

The nonprofit receives funding from the [Cleveland Foundation](#), the [George Gund Foundation](#) and the [Joyce Foundation](#). It was created to provide consensus-driven policy; promote education and awareness around the issues of harmful algae blooms; improve access to clean, affordable drinking water; and advocate for the funding of water infrastructure, Samuel said.

"We have been working to build a strong coalition of businesses and business organizations prior to today, and we're excited to unveil this to the entire state," he said.

The group also voiced support for Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio program, which was created in 2019 as a comprehensive water quality initiative. The [H2Ohio program](#) was awarded \$172 million in the 2020- 2021 biennium budget, and DeWine has proposed increasing that to about \$250 million in the upcoming 2022-2023 two-year budget.

The Ohio House's proposed budget earlier this month nixed the increase for the four state agencies — the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency and Lake Erie Commission — that receive money under the H2Ohio program. House and Senate committee discussions are scheduled throughout April. The state budget must be passed by June 30.

Samuel said the water coalition is committed to supporting the quality of Ohio water "from Lake Erie to the Ohio River and every inland lake, stream and river in between" and to ensure a consistent, effective, fair approach to protecting and preserving Ohio's natural water resources and its water infrastructure.