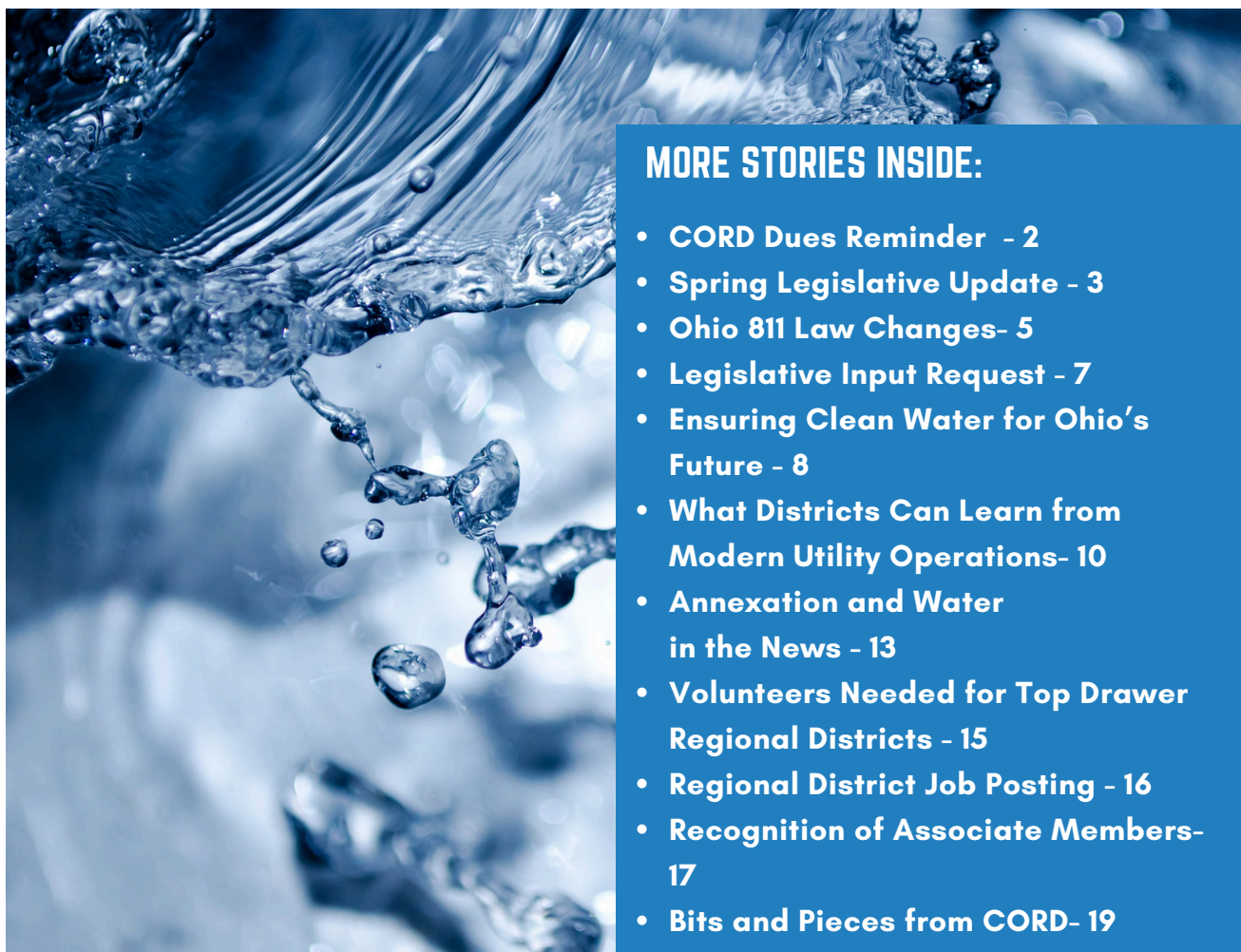


THE CORD REPORT

The Official Quarterly Newsletter of CORD



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CORD DUES MATERIALS FOR DISTRICT AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS TO BE EMAILED

LOOK FOR THEM IN YOUR INBOX!

Any Regional District formed under ORC Chapter 6119 may apply for membership. Districts should be on the lookout for 2026 dues membership statements and other materials from the CORD office during the month of April. Dues vary depending on the number of combined water and sewer taps connected to the district's system(s). Please reference the CORD website at cordohio.org to review the dues structure. A suggested Legislative Contribution is also included on the dues statement for each District. CORD advocates for regional districts on legislative issues before the Ohio General Assembly and modifies and/or defeats legislation along with advancing interests of regional districts with state and federal agencies and the suggested legislative fee allows CORD to work with Governmental Policy Group to make this happen!

Associate membership is open to companies that do business with Regional Districts, people interested in the activities of Districts, and other governmental entities such as county sanitary engineering departments, economic development organizations, other special purpose districts, and townships. In addition to regular membership, CORD also offers Silver, Gold, and Platinum Sponsorship Levels which allows for additional support to Districts that may need it. These options are included in the membership application form that is emailed to current and potential Associate Members. Return the membership application form with the indicated level of support to Catina Taylor at catina.taylor@alberslaw.com. If your organization requires a separate invoice, Catina can provide that as well.



GENERAL ASSEMBLY HEADED INTO SPRING 2026 WITH MUCH MORE WORK TO DO

Michael Guastella
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Beginning of 2026 Recap

The Ohio General Assembly has been back in action since the beginning of February after an extended holiday absence. 2025 proved to be one of the busiest legislative schedules in years, and 2026 is off to a similar start. The 136th General Assembly has about 8.5 months left to go - which may sound like a long time, but it is much less time than you might think.

We'll do a deeper dive on this and more in this CORD Legislative Update!

Priority Legislative Updates

House Bill 92/Senate Bill 118 - Water Liens

HHB 92 and SB 118 are bills that would change the way water utilities collect unpaid water bills. This legislation, if enacted, would prohibit a municipality from having the ability to place a lien on a property that is owned by someone who is not the occupant of that property due to unpaid water bills. Today, if a renter does not pay their water bill and moves away, the property owner/ landlord is liable for the unpaid water bills. If the owner fails to pay, and that property is in the service territory of a municipality, the municipality can place a tax lien on the property until the bills are paid. This bill would remove the municipality's ability to place the lien for that reason, and the municipality would be left to find other means of finding payment for the account.

After eight hearings on HB 92 in the Ohio House Local Government Committee, the legislation was passed out of committee and is awaiting a full House vote at the time this was written. The bill passed out of committee by a vote of 8-5.

As well, there have been five hearings on SB 118 in the Ohio Senate Local Government committee to date, but no committee vote.

HB 92 and SB 118 started out as companion bills - meaning they were identical bills introduced in each chamber of the Legislature. However, the bills have each received substitute documents and are no longer identical.

An important point to continue to make for our purposes is that 6119 districts are not present in the legislation. However, CORD remains engaged on the legislation, ready to oppose should 6119s become included.

HB 139 - Fire Hydrant Maintenance Plans

HB 139, introduced by Representative Thomas Hall, is a bill that (in its original form) would have required public water systems to conduct annual inspections, annual flow testing, and annual maintenance of every fire hydrant in the water system.

CORD immediately engaged with Rep. Hall to express our grave concerns with the costs associated with this bill and worked to find an alternative solution that worked for both sides. CORD was successful in producing substitute language that, instead of being very prescriptive in what was required, simply stated that it was incumbent on the public water system to come up with a “fire hydrant maintenance plan” and make it part of their existing asset management plan. This is already a requirement, so this should affect CORD members very little, assuming your District’s asset management plan is already in place.

The substitute bill was adopted in February, and the committee most recently heard the legislation on March 18. Rep. Hall is hopeful that the committee will pass the legislation before the summer break.

House Bill 284 - Requires American-Made Iron and Steel for Sewer Projects

HB 284, introduced by Reps. Hiner and Erika White, implements many of the “Buy America” provisions we have seen implemented at the federal level. This legislation requires that state-funded projects be constructed with American-made steel and iron.

The bill has received five hearings in the Ohio House Development Committee. To date, no CORD member has weighed in on this legislation. Please contact Michael Guastella at michael@gpgrhr.com if you wish to discuss this legislation.

What to Expect for the Rest of the 136th General Assembly

The General Assembly has been back since the first week of February. Since then, both the House and the Senate have been diligently working on and passing legislation until the expected break for the primary election at the end of March. The legislators will return to their districts for a month of campaigning leading up to the May 5 primary election. After the primary, they will likely return by the middle to end of May, where they will begin work on the capital budget, the biennial budget that appropriates funding to build and maintain the literal, physical “capital” assets of the state such as schools, critical infrastructure, etc. That work will conclude sometime in mid-to-late June, and that will end legislative activity for the remainder of the summer. It is likely that, after the capital bill is passed, the GA will not return to the Statehouse until after the November election and the infamous “lame duck” period of the General Assembly. “Lame duck” refers to the period directly after the general election, but before the beginning of a new General Assembly in January 2027. Meaning, the last six weeks of 2026 are shaping up to be quite busy.

2026 Political Review

In 2027, we will have a new Senate president, a new Governor, a new session of the General Assembly, and many new members of the General Assembly due to election outcomes or term limits. Leading up to that, however, is a slightly different story.

While it is expected to be a dramatic general election to be Ohio’s next governor, the primary elections will have much less fanfare. Vivek Ramaswamy has a clear path to secure the Republican nomination, with no significant challengers, and Amy Acton has the same for the Democrat primary.

Sherrod Brown is challenging incumbent US Senator Jon Husted for his old seat, which is expected to be a historically expensive race that could shift the balance of power in the United States Senate. Ohio’s primary election will be May 5, 2026 and the general election will be on November 3, 2026.

Questions and Contact Information

If you or members of your staff have any questions on new or pending legislation, please contact Michael Guastella at Governmental Policy Group, michael@gpgrhr.com.

CHANGES TO EXCAVATION AND UNDERGROUND UTILITY PROTECTION LAW ENACTED

Michael Guastella
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Governor DeWine recently signed House Bill 227, legislation that updates several provisions of Ohio law governing excavation activities and the protection of underground utility facilities. The bill makes changes to the state's "call before you dig" framework associated with the Ohio 811 system.

For Ohio's 6119 Districts, these updates are particularly relevant, as many Districts own, operate, or construct underground water and wastewater infrastructure and regularly coordinate with contractors and other utilities during excavation projects. The bill modifies notification timelines, training requirements, design-phase coordination, and damage reporting procedures that may affect how Districts interact with contractors and other utilities when underground facilities are present.

The legislation was signed on March 10, 2026, and will become effective on June 8, 2026. This article provides a summary of all you need to know on how the legislation may impact your District. For questions, contact Michael Guastella at Governmental Policy Group at michael@gpgrhr.com!

Updated Notification Timeline

One of the most notable changes in the bill standardizes the timeframe for excavation notifications. Under the updated law, excavators must notify the applicable protection service at least **two working days** before beginning excavation, not including the day the notification is made. Excavation notices may be submitted no more than sixteen calendar days before the planned start of work.

This revision replaces prior statutory language that generally required at least 48 hours notice.

Training Requirements for Excavation Participants

The bill also establishes training requirements for individuals and entities involved in the excavation notification process. Excavators, contractors, utilities, designers, developers, and utility locators who utilize a protection service and have responsibilities within the 811 processes must obtain training related to underground utility protection.

Employers are required to provide this training when employees are initially assigned duties involving excavation notification responsibilities. Employees must be retrained at least once every five years or whenever statutory changes affecting excavation laws occur. Employers must document and retain records of completed training.

Required training topics include the Ohio 811 notification process, the responsibilities of excavators and utilities, the positive response system used to communicate utility conflicts, universal marking standards, and applicable provisions of Ohio law governing excavation activities.

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Design-Phase Coordination with Utilities

HB 227 also expands requirements during the design phase of construction projects that involve excavation. Developers and project designers must notify a protection service in order to identify utilities that may have underground facilities at a proposed excavation site.

Utilities are required to respond with information regarding the location of their facilities. Upon request, utilities may mark the facilities in the field or provide scaled drawings that depict the location of underground infrastructure relative to identifiable site features.

Developers or designers must incorporate this information into project plans and provide those plans to the commercial excavator before excavation work begins. The legislation also encourages project designs that minimize interference with existing underground facilities and requires at least twelve inches of clearance between newly installed underground utilities and existing facilities unless utilities are notified otherwise.

Additional Requirements for Pipeline Coordination

The bill includes additional coordination requirements when projects occur within 660 feet of an interstate gas pipeline or interstate hazardous liquids pipeline. In those circumstances, pipeline operators must provide information regarding pipeline locations, rights-of-way, and any special notification requirements established under federal safety programs. Project plans must include contact information for the pipeline operator and document efforts to coordinate the project with the pipeline owner.

Excavation Safety Procedures

The legislation reinforces safety procedures that must be followed when excavation occurs near underground utilities. Excavators must maintain reasonable clearance between powered equipment and underground facilities and must use nondestructive excavation methods when working within the tolerance zone surrounding a utility.

When powered equipment is used near underground facilities, a person other than the equipment operator must visually monitor the excavation activity. Additional procedures are required when trenchless excavation technologies, such as horizontal directional drilling, are used. These include exposing existing utilities at crossing points and verifying utility locations prior to installation of new facilities.

Damage Reporting and Emergency Response

The bill clarifies and expands reporting requirements when underground utilities are damaged during excavation. Excavators must report damage—including dents, gouges, or coating damage—to the affected utility and the protection service as soon as the damage is discovered. If damage results in the release of flammable, toxic, or otherwise hazardous materials, the excavator must also notify emergency responders by contacting 911.

Reports must include information such as the location of the damage, the type of utility facility involved, and the approximate depth at which the facility was encountered.

Data Collection and Transparency

To support statewide damage-prevention efforts, the legislation requires protection services to maintain a centralized database of reported underground facility damage. Nonconfidential data must be made publicly available and may be used to improve excavation safety education and prevention programs.

Further Information

For those who need to get more into the details of the new legislation, you can contact me as noted above. Also, you can access the final enacted legislation and an summary analysis at: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb227/documents>

CORD LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM PROGRESS UPDATE: YOUR INPUT REQUESTED

As CORD continues to work on legislative issues in the General Assembly that have been requested by Districts, we need your help on a couple of issues. The two issues below were submitted by Districts and are included in the current CORD Legislative Platform for this session of the Ohio General Assembly.

Every two years CORD conducts a survey to give Districts the opportunity to recommend changes in state law that are needed by Districts. Yes, later this year, as the current session of the General Assembly concludes we will again be asking for input from both Districts and our Associate Members on any new legislative needs.

However, at this time, CORD is working to develop specific language on the two issues below. Please share any thoughts you have on these two issues, the nature of the problems you are experiencing, any cost implications, and if your District would be willing to testify before the General Assembly once we get bills drafted:



- **Reform: Legislation to clarify if a Joint Economic Development District (JEED) can contract with municipalities for services within a township.**
- **Reform: Clarify conflicting storm water authority of Regional Districts and County Sewer Districts (ORC 6117.02) and county sediment control rules. (ORC 307.79)**

Please share any comments you have on these two issues with Michael Guastella, our lobbyist with the Governmental Policy Group at michael@gpgrhr.com and Larry Long, Director of Membership Development at larrylong@cordohio.org.

As always, thanks for your help and support! And, again, our biennial Legislative Needs Survey will again be sent out in the fall so we can update this for the next session of the Ohio General Assembly—the 137th.



ENSURING CLEAN WATER FOR OHIO'S FUTURE

Written by Mary Turocy
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The Nature Conservancy



Mary Turocy
Ohio Director of Policy and
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The Nature Conservancy

Clean, reliable water is essential to Ohio's communities, economy, and way of life. From Lake Erie to the Ohio River, and from rural townships to major cities, Ohioans depend on healthy waterways and modern infrastructure to support daily life, public health, agriculture, recreation, and economic growth. Over the past several years, the H2Ohio program has become one of the state's most important tools for protecting water quality. Today, a broad and growing coalition is working to ensure this success continues by securing long-term, dedicated funding for H2Ohio.

What H2Ohio Has Achieved

Launched in 2019, H2Ohio is a comprehensive, statewide water quality initiative that brings together state agencies, farmers, conservation organizations, and local communities. Through investments in conservation farming practices, wetland restoration, and water infrastructure improvements, H2Ohio has delivered measurable benefits across Ohio.

To date, the program has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in projects that reduce nutrient runoff, restore wetlands that naturally filter pollution, and repair aging drinking water and wastewater systems. Thousands of farmers have voluntarily enrolled millions of acres in conservation practices that protect soil and water while strengthening farm operations. Communities across the state have used H2Ohio funding to improve access to safe drinking water, remove lead pipes, replace failing infrastructure, and address longstanding water quality challenges.

These results demonstrate that when Ohio makes sustained investments in water, communities, agriculture, and nature all benefit.

H2Ohio Is a Smart Economic Investment

New research shows that H2Ohio is not only effective but also a strong economic investment for Ohio. An analysis of H2Ohio projects found that wetland restoration alone delivers significant public value every year by improving water quality, reducing flood risks, supporting wildlife habitat, and expanding recreational opportunities. In 2024, for every \$1 Ohio invests in wetland restoration through H2Ohio, residents receive an estimated \$8 in benefits, including cleaner water, flood protection, and enhanced outdoor spaces. Investments in agricultural conservation practices also pay off, generating more than \$1 in benefits for every \$1 spent by reducing harmful algal blooms, protecting drinking water, supporting recreation, and avoiding costly cleanups. Another recent study found that replacing lead lines through programs like H2Ohio could boost Ohio's economy by as much as \$185 billion over the next 15 years. In addition, H2Ohio projects support hundreds of jobs annually and generate tens of millions of dollars in economic activity across local economies. Together, these findings confirm that H2Ohio delivers real returns for Ohio's people, communities, and economy.

Why Long-Term Funding Matters

Despite its success, H2Ohio currently relies on funding decisions made through the state's biennial budget process. This structure creates uncertainty for farmers, communities, and conservation partners who depend on consistent funding to plan and implement long-term projects. Wetland restoration, infrastructure replacement, and adoption of conservation practices all take time, and uncertainty can slow progress or raise costs.

That risk became clear in the state budget that passed in 2025, which significantly reduced funding available for H2Ohio compared to prior years, including reductions of 55% to the wetlands program and nearly 73% to the infrastructure programs. While H2Ohio continues, fluctuating support underscores the need for a more stable funding model that protects clean water investments from shifting budget priorities.

A Coalition Working for Long-Term Solutions

In response, the Ohio Water Bond Coalition has come together to advocate for a durable, long-term funding solution. The coalition includes leaders from the environmental, agricultural, business, and local government communities, reflecting the broad appeal and shared benefits of clean water investments. The Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts Board voted to become a member of the Coalition.

Last year, coalition members urged the Ohio General Assembly to pass a resolution to lock in long-term funding through a bond initiative. The resolution could put a constitutional amendment before Ohio voters that would authorize long-term bond funding dedicated to water quality improvements. Under the proposal, funds would be invested statewide to support conservation farming, wetland restoration, and water infrastructure improvements – building on the proven H2Ohio framework while providing the stability needed for long-term success.

The coalition's work includes educating policymakers, engaging stakeholders across the state, and preparing for future voter education efforts. By bringing diverse voices together, the coalition is helping ensure clean water remains a shared priority for Ohio.

Ohio Voters Strongly Support Clean-Water Investments

Recent statewide polling underscores just how strongly Ohioans value water quality. A survey of likely voters found broad, bipartisan support for a ballot measure that would provide long-term funding for water improvements. Support spans political parties, regions, and demographic groups, because most Ohioans understand that clean water is fundamental to public health and economic vitality.

Voters consistently ranked protecting drinking water, improving water infrastructure, restoring wetlands, and safeguarding rivers and lakes as highly important priorities. Indeed, a large majority of voters said the state should continue investing in water quality even when revenues are tight, and most want the opportunity to vote directly on a long-term funding solution.

Looking Ahead

H2Ohio has proven strategic investments can make a real difference for Ohio's water, communities, and economy. The challenge now is to protect and expand that progress. By advocating for long-term, dedicated funding, the Ohio Water Bond Coalition is working to give farmers, communities, and conservation partners the certainty they need to plan and deliver lasting results.

With strong public support, bipartisan momentum, and a clear track record of success, Ohio has a unique opportunity to secure clean water for generations to come. The work underway today is about more than funding – it is about ensuring every Ohioan, now and in the future, can count on safe drinking water and healthy waterways.



WHAT GROWING DISTRICTS CAN LEARN FROM JWSD'S APPROACH TO MODERN UTILITY OPERATIONS

Written by Danielle Bergey
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The challenge for many Ohio Regional Water and Sewer Districts is not just providing reliable service. It's doing so while managing expansion, administrative demands, and stricter reporting expectations. And customer expectations that keep moving in one direction: UP.

That is the reality "6119" Districts know so well. And it's one reason operational modernization has become a more pressing topic across the industry. CORD members are increasingly looking for practical ways to improve efficiency, accuracy, and service without adding unnecessary complexity.

Jefferson Water and Sewer District in Blacklick, in Franklin County, offers a strong example of what that can look like in practice. The District was created in 1987 to provide centralized water and sewer services to Jefferson Township. Today, it serves a mix of residential neighborhoods, multi-family communities, and rural properties. That kind of customer mix creates real operational complexity. Different usage patterns, different service needs, different communication expectations. And behind the scenes, that means staff need dependable systems that help information move cleanly between the field and the office.

Joshua Burklin, Office Manager at Jefferson Water and Sewer District, has seen that complexity from nearly every angle. He oversees customer service and billing, while also supporting accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, and the District's IT and network infrastructure. And, as he puts it, "This combination of responsibilities gives me a unique view of opportunities to improve efficiency and service delivery." And he saw an opportunity. They also had some challenges. Some of their biggest ones included manual workflows and paperwork that took significant time to complete, difficulty keeping up with administrative demands as the District grew, concerns about data accuracy (especially while reconciling), and communicating information between field and office staff.

"Outdated billing processes required staff to manually intervene at multiple steps," Josh noted. "Technology limitations slowed our ability to adapt to increasing regulatory and reporting requirements." So the District started to look for new utility software. "The biggest drivers were the need to streamline billing, reduce manual corrections, and improve transparency for customers," Joshua continued. "Our previous system required too many hands-on steps and didn't scale well with our administrative workload. We also wanted better reporting, more automation, and a platform that would support future growth."

That probably sounds familiar to many other Regional Districts. In utility operations, as many well know, inefficiency rarely stays in one lane. A billing issue becomes a customer service issue. A reconciliation issue becomes a reporting issue. A field-to-office communication gap turns into delays, rework, or avoidable frustration. Small process problems have a way of multiplying...

Jefferson was looking for a solution that would be easy for both staff and customers to use while still offering the utility-specific functionality a water and sewer district needs. The District prioritized strong billing and financial accuracy; dependable vendor support and training; integration between billing, accounting, and meter data; and the ability to scale as the District grew. Strong vendor support during the transition was also important.

That point deserves a pause.



Too often, software conversations focus only on features. But it's about people and partnership, too. Implementations don't necessarily succeed because a product demo looked good on a Tuesday afternoon. They succeed when the technology fits utility operations, when staff are brought into the process early, and when the vendor behaves like a partner rather than a one-night stand.

Modern utility platforms can help Districts in several ways. First, they can connect billing, accounting, and meter-related information more effectively, reducing duplicate entry and the opportunity for errors. Second, they can improve visibility, giving office staff faster access to current account information and reducing the amount of time spent chasing down answers. Third, they can support better service by shortening turnaround times and improving consistency for customers.

But a good utility system should not just look modern, either. It should help your team do the work better. It should reduce preventable errors. It should improve confidence in billing and financial data, in office and in the field. It should make life easier for the people answering customer questions. And it should give leadership a stronger operational foundation for the future.

Software Solutions, Inc.'s (SSI) VIP Utility Billing platform, for example, is built specifically for utility operations and is designed to integrate billing processes with accounting platforms, payroll, and metering systems so organizations can manage high data volumes with accuracy and efficiency. And their implementation and customer support team has a reputation of being the best in the industry.

So, Jefferson and SSI entered into a partnership. The District's implementation process followed a disciplined path: planning and data review, data migration and reconciliation, staff training in a sandbox environment, parallel runs to compare old and new outputs, go-live support with direct vendor involvement, and post-launch optimization. That kind of phased approach to implementation matters because transitions are rarely frictionless. But they are far more manageable when the process is structured and when staff have room to test, learn, and compare before the old system is retired.

Jefferson's response was not to just throw technology at the problem without a plan. Modernization doesn't have to mean disruption for disruption's sake. In fact, the best transitions usually feel methodical. They respect the fact that Districts cannot pause service to reinvent themselves. Customers still need bills. Payments still need to post. Reporting still needs to happen. The goal is not chaos in the name of progress. It is steady improvement with as little operational strain as possible.

So, the District leaned on collaboration between administrative, field, and vendor staff. "We worked through these challenges by investing in tools that reduce manual workload and standardizing our internal processes," Josh noted. "Collaboration between administrative and field staff was key, as was having strong vendor support during transitions."

Now, Jefferson is thriving. Josh says, "Since implementing the new billing system, we've seen more accurate and timely billing, faster administrative workflows with fewer manual steps, better access to real-time account information, reduced staff time spent troubleshooting or correcting data, and overall increased confidence in the reliability of our billing and financial systems."

The VIP Utility Billing software Jefferson chose allowed them to focus more on service and less on paperwork. They've even gone a step further by investing in SSI's accounting software, which they'll be implementing soon.

Josh put it plainly: “Delaying system upgrades increases long-term workload and adds risk. Choose software partners, not just software, because support and responsiveness matter as much as features. Document processes before implementing new systems; this makes training and onboarding much smoother. Prioritize data cleanup upfront so your new system starts with accurate, reliable information.” That’s advice worth underlining for any CORD member evaluating a change.

Jefferson’s experience also reflects a broader shift in the utility sector. Customers increasingly expect convenient digital options, clearer information, and faster service interactions. Jefferson’s website now includes an online billing and payment portal, giving customers more flexibility in how they manage their accounts. That kind of improvement is no longer a luxury. For many Districts, it is becoming part of the baseline expectation for public service.

So, what should other CORD members take away from Jefferson Water and Sewer District’s experience? Per Josh’s advice, don’t wait too long to address process strain. Manual workarounds have a way of becoming normal, even when they are quietly draining staff time and increasing risk. Second, involve frontline employees early. They often understand the day-to-day friction points better than anyone else and can help shape a better implementation. Third, look for solutions built with utility operations in mind. Generic systems may promise flexibility, but districts often end up paying for that flexibility in extra manual work, custom processes, and avoidable frustration. And fourth, as Josh puts it, “View system upgrades as a long-term investment in customer service, accuracy, and district sustainability.”

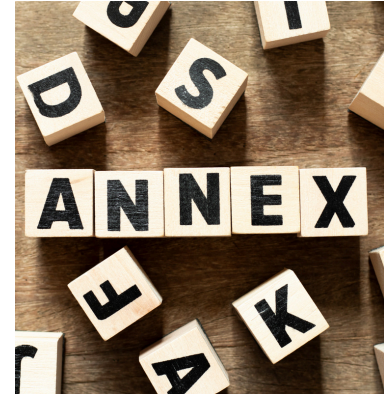
Jefferson Water and Sewer District offers a practical reminder that modernization does *not* have to be stressful. With the right partner, improvements can casually remove friction, strengthen confidence, and help Districts serve their communities better every single day.



ANNEXATION AND WATER: BACK IN THE NEWS

Written by Larry Long, Director of Membership and Development

The decades old controversy over Annexation and Water is raising its nasty head again—this time in Stark County. This issue is probably “hot” in other places around Ohio, but CORD just saw new articles on the controversy in Stark County, so we thought we would share the most recent developments on this recurring issue. The issue is often very emotional and includes debates over clean drinking water; the cost of city water to users outside of the city or village; the degree of control over the daily lives of residents by city government versus township government; and, the granddaddy of them all—the payment of municipal income taxes by township residents. In some cases, annexation may also determine where kids go to school. So, what’s up in Canton? What do the officials of the City of Canton and townships around the City think? What are municipal and township officials and residents saying?



The City of Canton is talking about requiring township residents with land contiguous to Canton to annex in order to get water. And the concept of the proposed Canton ordinance would make annexation a condition not only for new water hookups, but also when there is a name change or transfer of an existing account for a property that gets Canton water.

This means that if a current property is using Canton water and the house sells, then the property must be annexed if the new owner is to continue to use Canton water. While the intent is less clear in the case of rental property, it appears that annexation is also required if a new tenant is to receive the water bill.

As noted above, there is a self-imposed limitation in the proposed city ordinance. The new policy would only apply to “properties that are legally eligible for annexation at the time of an application” for water service. This means that the property must be contiguous or touch the existing boundaries of Canton.

In a letter signed by all 12 Canton City Council members asking the Law Department to draft the legislation the details were explained in more detail: “. . . when a property owner applies for new City water service or the transfer of existing City water service into a new owner’s name, and the property is outside but contiguous to the City and legally eligible for annexation, the applicant would be required to execute annexation paperwork as part of the water service process.”

The legislation would also give the City Service Director authority to issue a waiver. Before a waiver is issued by the Service Director, however, City Council must be notified. City Council may then deny the proposed waiver by a two-thirds vote of all Council Members. No action by Council would be deemed as approval of the action by the Service Director.

City Council members believe the proposal is needed because of a “long standing imbalance in how services are provided and funded...” citing infrastructure and services provided by the City that benefit township residents and businesses such as water, road maintenance, emergency medical services, and parks.

According to the City Council letter: “For decades, the City has borne the responsibility for regional challenges using City resources, while surrounding townships have not contributed proportionally. Many township residents and businesses benefitting from City infrastructure do not pay City income taxes, resulting in City residents subsidizing services outside the City limits.”

Council also maintains that the proposal is legal because it only applies when someone voluntarily seeks water service and annexation is legally permissible under the Ohio Revised Code. Evidently the City of Alliance has had similar legislation in the books since the early 2000's. In summary, according to City officials, following are the benefits of the proposed policy:

- Ensures equitable contribution from those benefiting from City services.
- Reduces subsidy burden on City residents.
- Encourages compact, coordinated growth.
- Aligns infrastructure investment with revenue.
- Strengthens long-term fiscal sustainability.
- Promotes fair regional partnership.

It appears the Council is supporting a new annexation policy advocated by newly elected City of Canton Mayor, William Sherer II, who campaigned on this issue and was elected Mayor and subsequently took office in 2024. Conflict arose when the City tried to annex land in Perry Township despite a 2023 Joint Economic Development District agreement that prohibited annexation. Perry Township objected to this annexation, filed suit for breach of contract, and the City cancelled the annexation proposal. The new Mayor was not aware of the JEDD's provisions which were agreed to by the previous Mayor.

Townships in Stark County are vocally opposing the proposed legislation. As reported in the Canton Repository, Plain Township Trustee Scott Haws said, "We're going to fight like hell." He has complained to state legislators about the need for annexation reform by the Ohio General Assembly. Annexation reform is one of the top legislative priorities of the Ohio Township Association."

Perry Township is even more aggressive in challenging the policy and the proposed legislation. In a letter from the Township's lawyer, the Township gave the City notice that it intends to explore and implement its own water supply under ORC Sections 504.18-514.20 using a private for-profit water supplier. Perry and Plain Townships are "Limited Home Rule" Townships and have this authority because of their "Home Rule" status.

Perry Township also notified the City of its intent to file a court action to enjoin the policy of the Mayor, as the legislation has not yet passed or even been introduced at the time of this writing. The Township maintains that the policy is discriminatory because determinations are made by the Service Director on a case-by-case basis instead of on the basis of uniformly applied criteria. Finally, the Perry Township raises the issue that the City water surcharge on non-resident properties may also be unlawful. One Perry Township resident may have said what a number of residents are thinking: "Water is a utility and everybody needs water to survive. It's extortion."

Editor's Note: Much of the material for this article is taken from an excellent series of articles in the Canton Repository, most of which were written by Abreanna Blose. These articles also included links to various source documents. CORD thanks Ms. Blose. Any errors are the complete responsibility of CORD in a current fast moving and developing story.





TOP DRAWER REGIONAL DISTRICTS: WE NEED VOLUNTEERS FOR 2026

You may notice that there is no “Top Drawer” article in this issue of the CORD Report. In each issue we try to highlight a District in a column we brand as “Top Drawer Regional Districts.” We are looking for Regional Districts to write an article about their District to address current project developments, personnel changes, success stories, and any challenges that the District may be having. This information is interesting and beneficial to CORD members and other interested stakeholders. In addition, if you do not have time to draft an article, just suggest a topic to the CORD staff and we will prepare a draft article for your review.

In past issues, the following Regional Districts have been spotlighted in the CORD Report as “Top Drawer” Districts:



Adams County Regional Water District

Jefferson Water & Sewer District

Rural Lorain County Water Authority

Deerfield Regional Stormwater District

Tappers Plains-Chester Water District

Northwestern Water & Sewer District

Mid-Ohio Water & Sewer District

Licking Regional Water District

ABC Stormwater District

So, get on board! Volunteer to be a “Top-Drawer” District in 2026

CORD Contacts:

Larry Long
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or

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REGIONAL DISTRICT JOB POSTING MID-OHIO REGIONAL WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT



The Mid-Ohio Water and Sewer District, located in London (Madison County) has two executive positions open and are seeking applicants. The District is seeking an **Executive Director**, a next-generation leader who can marry technical acumen with political savvy—securing sustainable water sources, guiding large-scale construction, and championing the public value of utilities to the community. This Executive Director will serve as the public face of the organization, reporting directly to the District Board of Trustees and managing a District staff of 30 to execute the day-to-day operations. The position is open due to the upcoming retirement of the current Director, Tom Taylor.

Also, due to unprecedented growth in Central Ohio, the District is currently seeking highly motivated and professional candidates for the **Finance Director** position within the District's leadership team. Responsibilities include the overall management of financial operations, accounting systems, budget development, fiscal controls, vendor contracts and purchasing, human resources, safety compliance and reporting, information technology and compliance with the Ohio Public Records and finance laws.

Additional information and application instructions can be found on the District website: <https://www.midohiowsd.gov/Jobs.aspx?CID=99>.

Note to CORD Members: Posting of District Jobs is provided as a service to both Districts and Associate Members at no charge. Please contact CORD Membership Director, Larry Long at larrylong@cordohio.org for further information.



SPOTLIGHT ON CORD'S 2026 GOLD ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

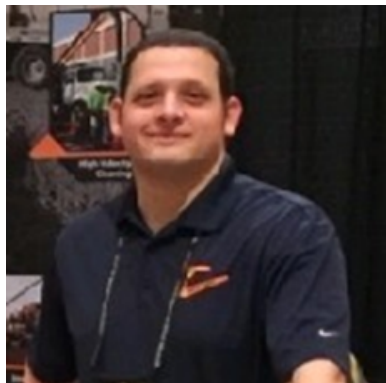
*CORD's Associate Membership Program is an important membership category to help CORD provide needed legislative representation in the Ohio General Assembly and before state agencies; to provide legislative/information alerts and the CORD's newsletter, The CORD Report; and, to provide other member services, including monitoring litigation that may set precedents that can impact Districts. We are grateful to the following **GOLD LEVEL ASSOCIATE MEMBERS** for their loyal support, assistance, and participation.*

GOLD ASSOCIATE MEMBERS



Theodore A. Bennett, PE,
Vice President, Director of Infrastructure
tbennette@jheng.com

GOLD ASSOCIATE MEMBERS



James Kratochvil
Operations Manager
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The are four levels of Associate Member Support: (1) Platinum (2) Gold (3) Silver, and (4) Regular. Platinum and Gold Associate Members are recognized in each issue of the CORD Report. Other Associate Members are recognized in the Annual Membership Recognition Issue of the CORD Report. CORD members are encouraged to express appreciation to ALL our loyal Associate Members. All Associate Members are recognized with links to their websites on the CORD Website at: <https://cordohio.org> .

A BIG THANKS TO ALL OUR ASSOCIATE MEMBERS!

BITS AND PIECES FROM CORD

Written by Larry Long, Director of Membership and Development

DeHart appointed Director of the Ohio Public Works Commission

Abbey M. DeHart has been appointed as Director of the Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC) by Governor DeWine. Her term began on January 30, 2026, and ends on March 18, 2029. Abbey is a familiar face at OPWC having previously served as a Program Representative, Loan Officer and Chief Financial Officer for her 18 years with the Commission.



In her leadership role, DeHart oversees the OPWC's mission to strengthen Ohio's infrastructure and conservation programs. She is responsible for managing the agency's partnerships with local governments and customers across the state to maintain and develop essential public works infrastructure. Congratulations to Abbey!



State Auditor Issues Annual CPI Bulletin for GAAP capital asset calculations

The State Auditor has issued **Bulletin 2026-001**, the annual Consumer Price Index Bulletin. If your District is reporting in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), this may apply to your District or your auditor when calculating the historical cost of capital assets. The Bulletin lists the CPI for years ranging from 1935 to 2025. If you have any questions, contact the Local Government Services staff of the Auditor's Office at (800) 345-2519 or ContactLGSeohioauditor.gov.

Reminder—Competitive Bid Threshold Increased on January 1

As CORD notified Regional Districts last year, the Ohio Department of Commerce published a new threshold limit for competitive bidding. The new threshold for 2026 will be \$79,568. This is an increase of 3% over the 2025 threshold as provided for in ORC Section 9.17. This limit also applies to the force account projects as provided for in ORC 6119.10: "The district may make improvements by force account or direct labor, provided that, if the estimated cost of supplies or material for any such improvement exceeds the amount specified in section 9.17 of the Revised Code, bids shall be received as provided in this section."



Licking Regional Water District Completes New Water Tower

The Licking Regional Water District in Franklin County has dedicated a new 750,000-gallon water tower. The tower will improve water pressure, fire protection, and service reliability for residents in several townships and the City of Pataskala. The \$6.2 million project is seen as a key economic development initiative in the area where growth from two anticipated Intel microchip facilities, now with delayed opening dates to around 2030, are under construction. In the vicinity of the tower a bulk water filling station is also a new asset for the District and its residents.

The tower project follows a 2022 expansion of the District to include territory in three townships in the northern and eastern part of Licking County. This change increased the area of the District from 10,000 to 18,000 acres. Prior to this change in boundaries of the District it served primarily the southwestern parts of Licking County.



Executive Director Jim Roberts speaks at the new Water Tower Opening.

Massive Investment Needed Over Next Two Decades to Address Water, Sewer & Stormwater Issues

In a recent research study by the Brookings Institute recent data from the U. S. EPA was used to show the massive need for investments to address water, sewer, and stormwater challenges. The U.S. EPA found that nationally \$744 billion will be required to work on drinking water and wastewater improvements over the next 20 years. Nationally there are more than 2.2 million miles of pipe in the ground, 16,000 treatment plants, and 250,000 rivers that measure 3 million miles that need help. These are mind boggling numbers!

The research shows that increased federal funding, especially from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)—is helping fill some of the gaps in funding. These two laws have provided approximately \$58 billion over a five-year period going toward water infrastructure, including billions to replace lead service lines, reduce emerging contaminants, and accelerate an assortment of other climate-related and technological upgrades. This represents the single largest federal water infrastructure investment ever. But this only starts to fill the massive need in the future.

Across the U.S. there are more than 50,000 water systems that vary widely in their geographic reach, customer base, and infrastructure assets. Some systems may only serve a few hundred households while others may serve hundreds of thousands. Eighty-eight percent of water utilities are publicly owned, but there are also private, or investor-owned utilities that have sizable footprints.

For more information see [Exploring and improving how state water funding flows amid a surge in federal infrastructure investment](#) , published by the Brookings Institute, a nonprofit based in Washington D. C. whose mission is to conduct in depth, nonpartisan research to improve policy and governance at the national and global levels.

Internet Posting of Employee Notices Now Allowed

Ohio law has traditionally required the posting of a number of labor related notices in the workplace. Various laws required public and private employers to “conspicuously” post these notices in the employer’s place or places of employment. Last year the law was amended to allow the posting of these notices on the internet. The new law requires notices “be posted on the internet in a manner that is accessible to the (public) employer’s employees.” This is the result of the enactment of S. B 33 of the 136th General Assembly which became effective last July. This is permissive legislation.

The Act applies to the following notices:

- Ohio’s Minor Labor Law (excluding the list of minors employed by an employer)--ORC 4109.08
- Ohio’s Minimum Fair Wage Standards Law (minimum wage and overtime)--ORC 4111.09
- Ohio’s Civil Rights Law--ORC 4112.07
- Ohio’s Prevailing Wage Law--4115.07
- Ohio’s Workers’ Compensation Law--4123.54 & 4123.83
- Ohio’s Public Employment Risk Reduction Program Law--ORC 4167.11



Severity of Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Improves in 2025

The annual assessment of Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB) in the western Lake Erie Basin from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for 2025 is now in. The agency concluded that the 2025 HAB was "mild" and less severe than in 2024. The score of this year's HAB was 2.4 compared to 4.2 in 2024. A severity index score below 3 is considered mild; from 3-5, moderate; 5-7, severe; and more than 7, very severe. The severity index measures the amount of biomass over the peak 30 days of a bloom using satellite imagery.

U. S. Ranked as #4 in Share of Freshwater Resources—Water Insecurity a Major Worldwide Problem

Regional Districts understand how valuable their water resources are to the customers they serve. Indeed, freshwater is one of the world’s most important resources. Its distribution, however, is far from even. Some countries are blessed with abundant freshwater from lakes, rivers, aquifers, and even glaciers. Others face extreme water insecurity.

Recent data provided by the World Bank shows the dilemma. Did you know that 96.5% of the Earth’s water is ocean water? Additionally, of the 3.5% remaining, five countries, including the U. S., can claim 35% of our planet’s renewable freshwater? These top five countries are:

Country	% of World Total Freshwater	Water Security Category
Brazil	13.20%	Moderately Secure
Russia	10.10%	Moderately Secure
Canada	6.70%	Water Secure
United States	6.60%	Water Secure
China	6.60%	Water Insecure

When it comes to water security, however, components other than freshwater quantity are considered. To measure water security one study looks at factors such as water quality, water quantity, sanitation, population growth, insufficient infrastructure, and flawed water governance. This results in a scoring system where countries are categorized as either (1) Water Secure (2) Moderately Secure (3) Water Insecure, or (4) Critically Insecure.

The table above includes the water security category for the U. S. and other countries. Water security is a major global challenge with 24 countries designated as “Critically Insecure”, and another 113 countries falling into the “Water Insecure” category.

