



GEAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Carolyn Brakey, Esq. James W. Dvorak Ralph Spidalieri

12611 Ravenwood Drive, Suite 350 • Chardon, Ohio 44024

June 17, 2025

Dr. Bruce T. Vanderhoff, MD, MBA
Director
Ohio Department of Health
246 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Operation & Maintenance Septic Inspection Program

Dear Dr. Vanderhoff:

We are writing to express our deep concerns regarding the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) septic inspection program mandated under Ohio Administrative Code 3701-29-19. This program, while well-intentioned, has created a significant and unnecessary burden on our residents—particularly those on fixed incomes—without clear evidence of improved environmental outcomes.

Gauga County is uniquely impacted by this regulation. The majority of our residents live in homes serviced by septic systems—estimated at approximately 30,000 across the county. These are not fringe cases; they represent the backbone of our rural housing infrastructure.

The O&M program imposes mandatory, ongoing inspection requirements and requires homeowners to pay regular permit fees—the amount and timing of which vary depending on the type of system. Most residents already take responsible care of their systems. Gauga Public Health (GPH), our local health department, is required to enforce this program under rules set by the Ohio Department of Health. To their credit, GPH has made every effort to implement the O&M program in a way that is minimally burdensome and cost-conscious for residents. The issue is not with their administration—it is with the rule itself, which mandates a sweeping, one-size-fits-all program with no flexibility to exempt responsible homeowners.

We are especially concerned about the impact on vulnerable residents. According to the 2020 Census, nearly a third of our population is over the age of 60, and many live on fixed incomes. The Gauga County Department on Aging reports that 30% of seniors receiving in-home services live at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. These are individuals already straining under rising costs for groceries, gas, and basic necessities. The O&M mandate adds yet another cost they are forced to absorb—with no clear benefit.

We believe Ohio can protect clean water without saddling residents with another unfunded state mandate. A more targeted approach—grounded in complaint response, high-risk system identification, and public education—could better safeguard environmental health without imposing universal fees and inspections on responsible homeowners.

We stand ready to work with your office to find a more balanced path forward—one that upholds environmental health while respecting the financial realities of rural Ohioans.

Sincerely,

The Geauga County Board of Commissioners



James Dvorak



Carolyn Brakey

Ralph Spidalieri

CC:

Mr. Gene Phillips, Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Health & Radiation Protection
The Honorable Sandra O'Brien, Ohio Senate, 32nd District
The Honorable Steve Demetriou, Ohio House, 35th District
The Honorable Sarah Fowler Arthur, Ohio House, 99th District