TO: Senators Dolan, Burke, & O’Brien
Representatives Oelslager, Cera, & Butler

FROM: William Murdock, MORPC Executive Director

DATE: June 25, 2019

SUBJECT: Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission House Bill 166 Letter of Interest

Members of the State Operating Budget Conference Committee, thank you for your leadership in producing two bipartisan budgets. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is a regional council of over 65 communities across Central Ohio’s rural, suburban, and urban areas. MORPC’s membership consists of cities, townships, counties, villages, and other government entities. Our policy stances reflects the collective voice of a very diverse group of local governments in Central Ohio, which is the fastest growing region in the state

Central Ohio local governments view House Bill 166 as an opportunity to collaborate with the state in finding solutions for our residents. As your work to finalize the operating budget, we urge you to consider the below five recommendations which will help position our region and state for prosperity.

**Ensuring HB 149 Related Provisions Are Not Included**

MORPC and its members were strongly concerned with House Bill 149’s (HB149) inclusion into the House passed version of the budget and applaud the Senate for removing it. The language provides a tax exemption for new residential development and is an attempt to usurp local decision making on land use, community planning and economic development incentives with a one-size-fits-all mandate. This exemption is expected to create an incentive for developers to retain and develop land and promote an increase in residential development in the state. Local governments would be unduly affected since there is no incentive for developers to begin construction, especially in a market downturn. Most importantly the loss of revenue will negatively impact our local governments and school districts.

Furthermore, we believe this language is unnecessary because we already have the tools available to local governments to accomplish the underlying purpose of this language. Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs), Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreements, and other programs provide communities with adequate residential construction incentives in specific circumstances that are tailored not only to provide assistance and incentives to the developer, but also to take into consideration the unique requirements of the particular local government.

We respectfully request that this language not be reinserted into HB166 and that HB 149 receive further consideration as a stand-alone bill.

William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director

Rory McGuiness
Chair

Karen J. Angelou
Vice Chair

Erik J. Janas
Secretary
Helping Families Weatherize their Home and Save Money

MORPC offers home energy efficiency and safety services at no cost to income-eligible residents to help keep them warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, all while lowering their energy bills. These programs are available all year to Franklin County residents. This benefit is critical for these families, who may have lower household incomes and are paying up to four times as much of their income on utilities compared to the average consumer. Through home weatherization services, these households will be safer and healthier for families and cost less to keep warm or cool that translates into savings for other critical needs like transportation, medical care, and food.

This budget currently calls for up to 20 percent of Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program funds to be transferred to weatherization. MORPC supports increasing this transfer to 25 percent, so MORPC staff can effectively administer this program that impacts so many hard working Ohioans. In addition, as your colleagues in the House deliberate over HB6 we urge you not to eliminate efficiency programs.

Census 2020: Ensuring an Accurate Complete Count

With many already projecting Ohio to lose a congressional seat, it is critical we conduct a clear and accurate count of Ohio’s population. This includes properly supporting communication and outreach efforts to reach Ohio’s hard-to-count populations and ensuring the state and its communities are fully prepared when the official count begins in April of next year. We are encouraged by Governor DeWine’s recent executive order which establishes the state’s Complete Count Commission. In addition we appreciate the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS)—the agency that oversees Ohio’s Census efforts—leadership in dedicating resources for a communications and outreach strategy in its internal budget.

We respectfully request the conference committee appropriates $1.1 million which would provide grants to nonprofit organizations in hard-to-count (HTC) communities and to local complete count committees to fund localized communication and outreach to their residents.

Protecting Dedicated Transit Dollars

We thank members of the Ohio General Assembly for their leadership in dedicating $70 million of General Revenue Fund (GRF) funding per year in the state transportation budget. Since these funds are from the GRF, we urge legislators to protect these dollars because quite simply this issue is too important to ignore. The executive operating budget provided $6.5 million to further support public transit operations, including support for the ODOT Office of Public Transit, drawing down federal transit funding, and supporting the Elderly and Disabled Fare Assistance Program. That annual line item was included in the House passed version of the operating budget, however it was not in the Senate version.

We recommend that this funding be restored by the conference committee.
Reinvesting in Local Communities

Local governments are the heart of Ohio’s success. They deliver critical services for residents and businesses. Ohio has long valued the role of local communities and has supported efforts statewide with Local Government Funds (LGF) as a way to invest in the local voice and strategy. It is for this reason, we were pleased to see the Senate increase the LGF from 1.66% to 1.68% of the state GRF. However, twelve years ago the LGF funding earmark percentage was 3.68%.

To ensure a continued level of local services statewide as well as giving our region the ability to deal with pressures of growth, we strongly recommend for the LGF percentage of the GRF be increased to 2.00 percent. This investment to our communities will assist local governments in providing services such as working to retain and recruit new businesses, ensuring needed repairs and improvements to local infrastructure, or solving difficult issues with both rural and urban access to employment and access to senior services.

Thank you for your consideration of these items of concern and opportunity. We look forward to continuing our important work together.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, at 614-233-4101 or at wmurdock@morpc.org with any questions or when MORPC can be of assistance.

Kind Regards,

William Murdock
MORPC Executive Director