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Testimony for the March 6, 2014 meeting of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Water Quality and Water Use Initiative.

I am Jerry Harte, Executive Director for the Michigan Water Environment Association. We are the professional development organization for over 1,800 Professionals in the wastewater treatment sector. One of the key points in our mission statement is “to Be and Create Advocates for Michigan’s water environment.”

In the last few years we have developed a great working relationship with the Department of Environmental Quality. The Water Resources Division regularly invites stakeholders to participate in the development and evaluation of the many programs they are charged with administering. We feel this has resulted in a genuine win/win situation. Their efforts have produced more efficiency in the processes, greatly reduced response time, and the improved communication systems have resulted in our membership being more informed.

On a separate note, I take this opportunity to commend Emily Finnell from the Office of the Great Lakes and the work she spearheaded on the Water Strategy. This was a massive undertaking in which we were invited to participate. We had the first-hand opportunity to observe the impressive organization and communication it has taken to bring this vitally important project to the point where it is now.

Our organization fully supports the requested funds needed to continue the DEQ’s Water programs. We feel it is very important that administration of the regulations and rules that are so vital to the health and sustainability of Michigan’s waters - our greatest resource - remain at the state level and not default to the federal government. Federal oversight has proved time after time to be a nightmare at the local level.

Finally, I’ll comment as a citizen of and taxpayer in Michigan. I am constantly amazed with the professionalism and expertise of all the staff in the Water Resources division. I always leave Constitution Hall after a meeting with staff members of DEQ with the comforting feeling that as a taxpayer my dollars are being very well spent with these committed and talented individuals.