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Testimony for the February 26, 2015 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 waste water treatment sector. Our members include systems operators, civil engineers and vendors of equipment and supplies. 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.

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.

Also, we support the continuation of the fee structures that are currently in place. The programs that these fees service must be continued. The payment of the fees is already calculated into the rates the users are paying. From our perspective user fees are almost always more equitable than servicing programs from general fund tax money.

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.