

**Testimony on SB 291**  
**Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee**  
**The Honorable Tom Neihaus, Chair**  
**Cheryl Johncox, Volunteer Water Issues Lobbyist, League of Women Voters of Ohio**  
**April 23, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Cheryl Johncox. I am a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of Ohio (League). The League appreciates this opportunity to testify in opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 291. The 3,000 members of the League throughout the state have made the Great Lakes Compact a priority issue for 2008.

Great Lakes' water plays a crucial role in an already thriving economy, supporting agriculture, shipping, heavy manufacturing, and electricity generation. It supplies drinking water to 11 million people, 3 million of whom live in Ohio. Lake Erie supports the largest sport fishery in the Great Lakes and is the largest commercial freshwater fisheries in the world. Lake Erie generates \$8.5 billion dollars annually from fishing, tourism and travel revenue. The Great Lakes Compact has been thoughtfully crafted over many years of negotiation to protect the Great Lakes and the Ohio industries that are dependent on them. The League supports the Great Lakes Compact as endorsed by the Council of Great Lakes Governors and passed by the Ohio House in House Bill 416. The Ohio House honored the gentlemen's agreement entered into, knowing that the Compact, as written, specifically reinforces state and federal property rights, by saying that the Compact can not "affect, limit, diminish, or impair any rights validly established."

The League supports a ban on diversions of water to areas outside the Great Lakes Basin with limited exception. Senate Bill 291 would allow five states upstream to approve diversions which could harm Lake's Erie and Ontario. The single state veto to limit diversions, as included in the Great Lakes Compact and agreed to by the Council of Great Lakes Governors, is essential. As the waters of the Great Lakes states are interconnected, present and future conditions of the Great Lakes' ecosystems should be a primary consideration when weighing the water needs of other areas.

Pollution, invasive species, and habitat destruction severely threatening this fragile resource. As the Great Lakes water levels rise and fall, and more power in Washington shifts to the water-starved states, it is increasingly urgent that we enact Ohio House Bill 416 and not denude the Compact of its essential purpose of cooperation and consistency throughout the Basin. It is imperative that we uphold each state's obligation to protect and conserve all waters within their borders.

The Council of Great Lakes Governors' recent statement included the following warning: "Recent proposals by individual state legislators to change the compact threaten to destroy its protections and to jeopardize regional management of the Great Lakes" (2-19-08, <http://www.cglg.org/index.asp>). The League is optimistic that the Ohio Senate will join the over 900 legislators who have already voted to ratify the Great Lakes Compact as endorsed by the Council of Great Lakes Governors and the Ohio House.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio can not support the Ohio General Assembly passing the Compact if it chooses to make changes to the Compact language that was so carefully negotiated and balanced over many years with the involvement of so many stakeholders.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the League of Women Voters of Ohio's position on this issue.