



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

**TESTIMONY OF HOWARD A. LEARNER
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IN SUPPORT OF FY 24 APPROPRIATIONS for the GREAT LAKES AUTHORITY
to the
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT & RELATED AGENCIES
April 17, 2023 – WASHINGTON D.C.**

I am Howard A. Learner, the Executive Director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC), which is the Midwest's leading environmental legal advocacy and sustainability innovation organization. ELPC's staff works throughout the region, in Washington D.C. and with Canada to protect the Great Lakes, advance renewable energy solutions and support sustainable economic development.

Thank you Chair Fleischmann, Ranking Member Kaptur and all members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of a robust FY 2024 appropriations to support the new Great Lakes Authority, which was authorized in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. That robust funding should be consistent with and on par with the appropriations provided to the other existing regional commissions, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, Northern Border Regional Commission, Southeast Crescent Regional Commission and Southwest Border Regional Commission. (Currently, the three latter regional commissions are each authorized to receive \$33 million annually through FY 2023.)

The Great Lakes are a global gem. They contain 21% of the planet's fresh water supply, and 42 million people rely on the Great Lakes for safe drinking water. They provide a rich aquatic habitat for many species. They support a \$7 billion annual fishing industry, and Great Lakes recreation draws millions of tourists who boost the economies of shoreline communities. In short, the Great Lakes are where many millions of people live, work and play.

ELPC is pleased to agree with and support the request of the 17 bipartisan Members who wrote their March 31, 2023 letter to you "request[ing] a robust appropriation for the Great Lakes Authority." They correctly explain that:

It is time to give the Great Lakes states the regional entity we need but have lacked for many years. With sufficient funding, the Great Lakes Authority can grow the capacity for successful economic development in the region; promote renewable energy and energy independence; provide assistance to economically distressed and underserved communities; and responsibly steward the Great Lakes region's vital environmental resources.

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The authorization for the Great Lakes Authority provides a starting point for building economic development opportunities across the Great Lakes states. ELPC recognizes the tremendous opportunities to advance renewable energy development and deployment and other sustainable economic development. The Great Lakes Authority can collaborate with local communities, state governments, and other public and private stakeholders to:

- Foster innovation to strengthen and expand domestic manufacturing, and promote more clean renewable energy.
- Promote community economic development and job creation, and help create world-class workforce education, training and development for the Great Lakes states.
- Accelerate renewable energy resources in the Great Lakes region, and encourage resource conservation, tourism, recreation and preservation of open spaces in a manner consistent with economic development goals.
- Establish and administer funding mechanisms to finance renewable energy, green infrastructure, water infrastructure and broadband infrastructure projects.
- Create an economic and infrastructure development plan for the Great Lakes region.
- Identify and advance solutions to other important economic and environmental challenges in the Great Lakes region.

The Great Lakes Authority should also promptly evaluate the potential for establishing a Great Lakes regional power marketing authority, such as the Western Area Power Administration and the Bonneville Power Administration, in order to facilitate and support accelerating renewable energy development, deployment and utilization in the Great Lakes region. The Great Lakes Authority itself could act as the power marketing agency or encourage the creation of a separate entity.

Thank you for your and the Subcommittee's and the full House Appropriations Committee's consideration of the recommendations included in my testimony. I would be pleased to respond to any questions or suggestions that you and the other Subcommittee members may have.

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