



HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Appropriations Requests for Legislatively Directed Spending Items

1. The sponsoring representative's first name:
Gina
2. The sponsoring representative's last name:
Johnsen
3. The cosponsoring representatives' names. All cosponsors must be listed. If none, please type 'n/a.' A signed letter from the sponsor approving the co-sponsorship and a signed letter from the member wishing to co-sponsor are required. Attach letters at question #9 below.
n/a
4. Name of the entity that the spending item is intended for:
Ionia Conservation District
5. Physical address of the entity that the spending item is intended for:
431 Swartz Court, #300, Ionia, MI 48846
6. If there is not a specific recipient, the intended location of the project or activity:
n/a
7. Name of the representative and the district number where the legislatively directed spending item is located:
Gina Johnsen, 78th House District
8. Purpose of the legislatively directed spending item. Please include how it provides a public benefit and why it is an appropriate use of taxpayer funding. Please also demonstrate that the item does not violate Article IV, S 30 of the Michigan Constitution.
The purpose of this proposed legislatively directed spending item is to support employee retention and the hiring of a dedicated outreach staff member for the Ionia Conservation District. Conservation Districts play a critical role in assisting landowners, farmers, and local governments with the implementation of conservation practices that protect natural resources and improve land stewardship. However, the Ionia Conservation District has faced persistent challenges in retaining skilled staff due to inconsistent funding, rising operational costs, limited access to training, and a lack of adequate support for

competitive compensation and employee benefits.

This proposed appropriation will provide \$100,000 to fund an Outreach Staff and Employee Retention Package for the Ionia Conservation District. The package will support the retention of experienced technical staff and the addition of a part-time outreach coordinator who will assist in communicating available conservation programs to the public, expanding local participation, and translating technical information into accessible language for constituents. These investments will increase the District's ability to deliver high-quality, science-based services; build stronger community partnerships; and leverage additional conservation funding from state and federal partners.

The proposed spending item provides a significant public benefit by strengthening the capacity of the Conservation District to protect local water, soil, and land resources. It will enhance the District's ability to support agriculture and ensure Ionia County residents have continued access to trusted conservation guidance.

This proposed legislatively directed spending item is an appropriate use of taxpayer funding. It directly supports the mission of a local unit of government engaged in public conservation work and provides no private benefit. All funds will be used to improve public programming and service delivery for the benefit of the Ionia County community.

Accordingly, this proposed appropriation complies fully with Article IV, Section 30 of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits the use of public funds for private purposes. Funds will be used exclusively for public benefit through expanded staffing, outreach, and conservation service delivery within Ionia County.

9. Attach documents here if needed:

Attachments added to the end of this file.

10. The amount of state funding requested for the legislatively directed spending item.

100000

11. Has the legislatively directed spending item previously received any of the following types of funding? Check all that apply.

["State", "Local", "Federal"]

12. Please select one of the following groups that describes the entity requesting the legislatively directed spending item:

Local unit government

13. For a non-profit organization, has the organization been operating within Michigan for the preceding 36 months?

Not applicable

14. For a non-profit organization, has the entity had a physical office within Michigan for the preceding 12 months?

Not applicable

15. For a non-profit organization, does the organization have a board of directors?

Not applicable

16. For a non-profit organization, list all the active members on the organization's board of directors and any other officers. If this question is not applicable, please type 'n/a.'

n/a

17. "I certify that neither the sponsoring representative nor the sponsoring representative's staff or immediate family has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest in the legislatively directed spending item."

Yes, this is correct

18. Anticipated start and end dates for the legislatively directed spending item:

October 1, 2025 - September 31, 2026

19. "I hereby certify that all information provided in this request is true and accurate."

Yes



Barry
Conservation
District

From the desks of Ionia and Barry Conservation Districts
barrycd.org – ioniacd.org



April 24, 2025

Dear Representative Johnsen,

Michigan's Conservation Districts are essential partners in delivering Farm Bill and other conservation assistance to farmers across the state, often acting as liaisons between their community and the government while leveraging federal, state, and local funding for their counties. The Districts play a direct and vital role in conserving our natural resources, especially soil health and water quality, which are foundational to food production and healthy communities in Ionia, Barry, and surrounding counties. Their work ensures that Michigan families continue to have access to outdoor recreation, clean water, productive soils and nutritious food. Even as funding support has ebbed and flowed through the years, Districts have remained steadfast in their commitment to assisting the agricultural community and safeguarding the future of agriculture and protection of natural resources for future generations of Michiganders.

To achieve these outcomes, long term employees of Conservation Districts are can build strong regional partnerships with organizations like Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW), Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP), Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), NRCS, Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, Farm Bureau, 4-H, and many others. These collaborations amplify their impact and extend technical and financial support to local agricultural communities through non-regulatory programs and services and provide outreach opportunities with community members of all types, including the agricultural community and their families.

Despite these successes, Michigan's Conservation Districts are struggling to maintain the staff and resources necessary to meet growing demands. With state operational funding significantly lower than in other states, many districts face high staff turnover and limited capacity. All available funding is tied to specific short-term projects, or provide so little support funds that they do not cover a competitive wage and benefits package for even one full-time staff member, leaving districts without the stable monetary or technical support needed for long-term planning and proactive solutions.

To address this, the boards of Barry and Ionia Conservation Districts unanimously support a request to increase state investment in Conservation District wages and benefits, particularly in the productive communities of Ionia and Barry County. This support will allow districts to retain experienced and degree educated staff, expand their capacity, and act as leaders - rather than responders - in the protection of Michigan's environmental and agricultural future, rather than the underfunded training grounds for some of this State's best natural resource professionals.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ionia Board Chairman, Art Pelon

ioniacd@gmail.com
barryconservation@macd.org

Barry Board Chairman, David Comeau

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269-908-4139