



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:
Barry Conservation District
5. Physical address of the entity that the spending item is intended for:
1611 S. Hanover Street, Suite 105, Hastings, MI 49058
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 Barry Conservation District. Conservation Districts serve a vital public function by assisting landowners, farmers, and local governments with the implementation of conservation practices that protect soil, water, forests, and other natural resources. However, the Barry Conservation District faces ongoing challenges in retaining qualified staff due to unstable funding, increasing operational costs, and limited capacity to offer competitive compensation and

benefits.

This proposed appropriation will provide \$100,000 to fund an Outreach Staff and Employee Retention Package for the Barry Conservation District. The investment will allow the District to retain highly skilled technical employees and hire a dedicated part-time outreach coordinator to support public engagement and awareness efforts. By enhancing staffing capacity, the District will improve its ability to deliver conservation programs, build stronger community relationships, and increase participation in state and federal initiatives that bring additional resources to Barry County.

The public benefit of this investment is clear. By strengthening its workforce, the District will expand its technical assistance to landowners, support sustainable land use, and help protect critical natural resources. This, in turn, supports agriculture, improves environmental quality, and ensures residents continue to receive trusted, science-based conservation services.

This proposed legislatively directed spending item is an appropriate use of taxpayer funds. The Barry Conservation District is a local unit of government carrying out a public mission with no private benefit. All funding will be used to strengthen public service delivery and enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts across the county.

Accordingly, this appropriation fully complies with Article IV, Section 30 of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits the use of public funds for private purposes. Every dollar will be directed toward staffing, outreach, and programmatic improvements that provide lasting public benefit to the residents and natural resources of Barry 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.

["Local","State","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