

**Statement of Mayor D. Michael Collins
City of Toledo
Before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee**

December 3, 2014

“Impact of Harmful Algal Blooms Requires Action”

Chairman Stabenow and esteemed members of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, thank you for allowing me the honor of testifying before you today.

On the weekend of August 2nd 2014, the City of Toledo made headlines nationally and internationally when we were impacted by Harmful Algal Blooms; creating a situation where a "Do not consume" order was given to the more than 400,000 customers of our public water system which includes Northwestern Ohio and parts of Southeast Michigan. We weathered the 72 hour incident because our community pulled together, there was no violence, no one became ill. Water was supplied to those who were in need, stores were restocked and the water was deemed again safe to consume. Toledo has taken additional steps to prevent our water supply from being impacted by the microcystin toxin that is a result of the algal blooms. It has impacted our region financially, businesses lost several million dollars when public water was not available and millions have been spent by the City for additional chemicals and treatment processes.

I am here today because though as Mayor, I would love the pictures of the lines of those waiting for water or the images of the green algae to be forgotten; if we forget what happened in Toledo, it is doomed to be repeated. Toxic algal blooms are not new, we have as a nation failed in studying the reasons why they continue and in taking steps to reduce or eliminate their occurrence. There are many theories as to why, but we have not identified all the causes, phosphorus in Lake Erie has been reduced dramatically since the 1960s, however problems still remain; is it the new formulation of fertilizers? Open Lake dredging? Invasive species interfering with the ecology of the Lake? We do not know for certain.

This is not just Toledo's problem or Ohio's problem, it is an international problem, more than 80% of the water in Lake Erie comes from the Great Lakes to the West and North via the Detroit River. Standards developed by the World Health Organization in 1996 have not been evaluated or confirmed by our Federal EPA. Testing is not standardized or even required in all areas impacted by algal blooms.

I urge Congress to work together with the Administration to recognize that Lake Erie and our Great Lakes are national treasures and to make our region's water quality issues a priority by taking the following actions: First – provide additional research funding for the causes and solutions for improving water quality. Second – EPA should set a Federal water quality standard for toxic algal blooms. Third – the Federal Government must prioritize and target funding for infrastructure and conservation funding to those watersheds that most affect the water quality of Lake Erie. If we continue to delay the harm may be irreparable. Thank you for allowing me to share this information and to have it included as part of the record.