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Testimony of William A. Spratley
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Opposition Testimony for Ohio House Bill 554

November 30, 2016

Chairman Dovilla, Vice Chairwoman Roegner, Ranking Member Ashford, and Members of the Ohio House Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to House Bill 554.

As you may know, I served 20 years in Ohio state government. I began in 1973 as a legislative liaison in Governor Jack Gilligan's Office, then several years as a hearing examiner and legislative liaison at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and finally over 16 years as Ohio's first Consumers' Counsel from 1977 to 1993.

I know how energy works in Ohio. I have been inside coal and nuclear power plants, three underground mines, a gas pipeline compressor station, on a hydraulic fracking big rig, inside hydroelectric dams, wind farms, utility-scale solar arrays and in telephone central offices, and private water plants. My state service led to my appointment to three Secretary of Energy Advisory Boards under Presidents Carter, H.W. Bush and Clinton.

After leaving state government from 1994 to 2002, I traveled to other state capitols as an energy consultant and made presentations to a dozen state legislatures and a number of others on the topics of electric industry restructuring and the nascent potential of solar electricity.

In 2001, I became Executive Director of Green Energy Ohio or GEO. We are a statewide non-profit with the mission dedicated to promoting economically and environmentally sustainable policies and practices in Ohio. We have about 400 members including 72 business members who are building a new energy industry across Ohio every day.

Yesterday our 36th edition of the full color, *GEO News Magazine* was delivered to your legislative offices as we have done since 2008 when the landmark SB 221 was enacted nearly unanimously by the General Assembly.

Since 2003, GEO has conducted annual educational tours to over 900 individual sites using solar, wind, energy efficiency, biomass, hydro and related green technologies across 66 of Ohio's 88 counties.

We were pleased to report in our Summer 2016 *GEO News Magazine* that our statewide solar survey shows that solar energy is now at work in all 88 Ohio Counties. On a national basis, a solar array is being installed every 2 and a half minutes. In Ohio too, we see a growing industry.

Our Summer magazine edition also documents the number of solar installations and energy capacity of solar by county. Ohio had 132.5 megawatts (MW) of solar installed as of this May, including 25 large-scale solar installations we describe in detail on factory and warehouse roofs and ground mounted to serve electric utilities, factories, schools and zoos and other Ohio load centers.

This is an immense growth in solar electric or photovoltaic installations in Ohio. For example, when GEO was the local host for the National Solar Conference in July 2007 attended by 5,000 people in downtown Cleveland, Ohio had less than 1 MW of installation solar in the entire state!

A year later, SB 221 setting up the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and Solar Carve-Out was enacted and for the next 6 years solar installations soared across Ohio thanks to our lawmakers making Ohio the 25th state in 2008 to adopt a RPS.

We now have an energy marketplace where utility-scale solar is the technology chosen by many utilities for additions to their grids. Our last several magazines describe new Community Solar projects at Ohio municipal and rural electric cooperative utilities and we observe that AEP Ohio has recently received approval for 500 MW of wind power and 400 MW of solar power. North of us in Minnesota, the investor-owned Excel utility is deploying 800 MW of Community Solar as solar is now widely considered economic at utility-scale.

For some time now public opinion polls have shown solar and wind to be popular with the consumers of energy. Now economics of the marketplace are allowing consumers and utilities to choose cleaner, renewable energy.

At the August 25 GEO Building Big Solar Across Ohio Conference at Bowling Green, Ohio we learned that the largest solar array in the state – a 20 MW systems with trackers to be completed by year’s end – will provide power to the Bowling Green Municipal Utility at no cost increase to utility consumers.

The cost-saving promise of solar is now coming to pass in spite of policy obstructions. As a state we can embrace a cleaner energy source and help communities and businesses create jobs to build a sustainable energy future. Many states are hard at work increasing their share of the renewable energy future. Few have followed Ohio’s lead to “freeze” renewable energy incentives.

In summary, Ohio can continue to discourage investment in solar and wind technologies, but the technologies will not be stopped by legislative edicts. Solar and wind costs are continuing to decrease. The real damage to Ohio is its relative position to other states that are growing renewable energy faster by encouraging investment and new jobs.

I am more confident than ever before that Ohioans will continue to choose renewable energy. I ask you to restore the proven benefits of SB 221 and reasonable wind farm property setbacks to help make Ohio a leader in renewable energy.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I welcome any questions the committee may have.