

Good Morning. My name is Maureen Neff. It is an honor to address you today about House Bill 175.

I live in the City of Bedford Ohio, a south east suburb of Cleveland. Bedford is a so-called food desert, an urban area with very limited access to fresh, affordable food.

In a city of 13,000 people where the median household income is approximately \$42,000 a year there is only one grocery store. My family which falls into the top 1% of household income in the City of Bedford cannot afford to shop there due to their inflated prices. I travel three cities away to do my grocery shopping, where I can affordably purchase the items my family needs.

Because of Bedford's food scarcity situation my husband and I have taken the responsibility of providing fresh, local food for our three young sons into our own hands. We grow a large garden, with everything from sweet corn to blackberries. We preserve our homegrown food for the winter through canning and drying. We fish Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and Lake Superior for Walleye, Perch and Salmon. We hunt wild turkey and deer, which we process ourselves in our home.

Unfortunately for my family the City of Bedford does not recognize our food scarcity problem.

We are currently not allowed to responsibly keep chickens. We are currently not allowed to safely collect our rainwater for re-use on our garden. I currently cannot keep a compost pile in my back yard on my two and a half acre lot. Front yard gardens are outlawed to keep property value up and many tall vegetables like corn are lumped in with noxious weeds. All because of outdated city ordinances and city leaders who are out of touch with the needs of their residents.

This is not acceptable. And this issue is larger than just the effect it has on my family. There have been food scarcity issues at other points in history. I am sure you remember.

Decades and decades ago, when my grandfathers were fighting in World War II, both of my grandmothers, in Cleveland Ohio and in West Stanley, England kept Victory gardens. This was considered one of the most patriotic things that a woman could do. Not only were victory gardens kept in private residences but in public parks as well. These gardens reduced the strain on the food supply and helped communities make it through the difficult times. If our country ever had to start issuing ration cards again – and in our current geopolitical climate I am not sure that is something we should dismiss-- we are raising an entire generation of Americans that would not be able to feed themselves. There is an entire generation of Americans being taught that keeping our property values up by lumping front yard gardens in with noxious weeds in city ordinances is more important than being able to feed yourself and your family.

I think in consideration of this Bill it would be prudent to ask the following questions. When did feeding ones family from the soil you own take second place to property values? When did being a patriot by growing a garden and raising chickens to offset your family's strain on the food supply become a misdemeanor offense? And perhaps most importantly, why are we teaching our children that overpriced produce shipped in from out of the country is what they deserve?

The passage of house bill 175 would mean, personally, that I would be further able to provide my family with healthy and locally grown food. For others in Ohio's urban food deserts it may mean much more. Residents of cities like Bedford with food scarcity issues would no longer have their hands tied by city

ordinances. A new generation of children could learn how to provide for themselves. This could instill a sense of pride in self and property that many urbanites have not felt for generations.

Please vote yes on House Bill 175.

Thank you for your time.