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Proponent Testimony HB 163

Chairman Young, Vice Chair DeVitis, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, My name is Jeannie Hoffman, I am a resident and small business owner in Gahanna, Ohio and I am honored to testify in support of HB 163 before you today.

I live in a part of Gahanna where most of the neighborhoods are well over 25 years old. The sidewalks are deteriorating to the point that most people walk, jog, bike and push strollers on the street. I see this as a huge safety issue. The state of our sidewalks became increasingly visible to me in the past year as I was going door to door for a citizen's initiative petition regarding property rights in Gahanna.

While talking to residents I would ask if there was one thing you could change about the city what would it be. Often residents would point towards the street and say "sidewalks, many of our sidewalks are in need of repair". I found that many residents did not know it was the property owner who is responsible to maintain the sidewalks (Gahanna Municipal Code 521.06), even though they are in the city right of way.

Being an engaged community member, I started brainstorming and came up with an idea. I approached Ward 2 Councilman Michael Schnetzer and proposed to him the possibility of the city being able to use their buying power, or economy of scale, to replace sidewalks in large areas and pass the savings on to residents. To pay for the project property owners would have the option to pay up front or through a property tax assessed over time, providing citizens with a financing option. This would be a win-win for the residents and the city, or so I thought.

At the next regular meeting of Gahanna City Council, Councilman Schnetzer brought up the topic of sidewalk repairs and pitched my idea. The reply given by Rob Priestas, Gahanna City Engineer, was the first time I have ever hear the words "prevailing wage" at a council meeting. I have attended a lot of Gahanna City

Council meetings and it would be a rare occasion that you would not find me in council chambers on a Monday night. When Mr. Priestas gave the answer that any savings that could be potentially passed on to residents through economy of scale would be nullified by prevailing wage, I was a bit surprised. Why is it that a city cannot get a better price on a large project than the average resident? The answer I was given is archaic Prevailing Wage laws mandated by the state.

HB 200 would give communities like Gahanna flexibility and control to not only improve their communities, but do so in creative ways.

Chairman Young and members of the House Economic Development, Labor and Commerce committee, how many other communities across Ohio are waiting to start projects because of Prevailing Wage laws? In Gahanna we are going through the beginning stages of the budget process right now. I look at the dollars attached to some of these projects in our Capital Needs Assessment and they are pretty high. If schools were exempted long ago why have we not extended that flexibility to our municipalities?

The potential savings to taxpayers, let alone opportunity to complete additional projects, if cities had the option of not being required to pay prevailing wage could be huge. I can only imagine if replacing sidewalks gets more expensive when bid through the city, how much everything else must be costing the city.

Chairman Young, Vice-Chair DeVitis, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and honorable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.