

Interested Party Testimony of Peggy Emerson on H. B. No. 49
Executive Director, Paulding Chamber of Commerce
Ohio House Finance Committee
April 5, 2017

Good Morning Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49. My name is Peggy Emerson and I am Executive Director of the Paulding Chamber of Commerce.

As a business representative who works each day to grow my community's economy, I strongly recommend that you act immediately include a fix in HB 49 that restores reasonable wind turbine setback standards. They should be returned to standard prior to 2014, which required setbacks of 1.1 turbine lengths from the property line.

I'll explain why I believe this is an important, urgent, and constructive step for Ohio to take. But first let me share the benefits of wind development we've experienced in my community.

Paulding County is a very small and rural county up in northwestern Ohio. But we are blessed with wind and also with high-powered transmission lines, which makes us a magnet for wind power development. We are currently completing our third wind farm in our county, and wind has been a \$200 million investment in our small rural county.

Wind development has positively impacted our small businesses, our schools, our townships, and our fire departments. Plus, there is all the local money that folks get just for leasing their land. It's our cash crop that is not diminished by drought, rain, or the seasons. We are thrilled to be a part of the changes in clean energy because the changes have been a great opportunity for us.

In 2009, like many rural counties, Paulding County was in a perilous financial condition. County employees had been cut back to seven hours per day, four days per week to cut costs and avoid layoffs. Our County Sheriff sued our County Commissioners because he was not given adequate funding to do his job.

This all changed when two major wind developers began constructing wind farms in our county in 2010. With fiscal discipline and these new opportunities to generate local revenue, we have been able to restore full time county services for all residents, expand our educational opportunities for children, and build up a rainy day fund. Righting our budget ship while keeping down taxes makes our community more affordable, which is especially important for retirees on fixed incomes.

These projects have created hundreds of construction jobs, dozens of permanent jobs, and involved many local companies and Chamber members. In addition to the \$200 million investment in our community, 167 landowners receive payments for leasing their land.

Isn't this the success story everyone talks about – to balance government budgets not by raising taxes or ending critical services but by increasing business activity while making prudent fiscal decisions? Paulding County is living that success story.

I believe more Ohio communities ought to have the opportunity we did. For other small, rural communities like Paulding, the hope and promise of jobs provided by the wind farms is critical.

But our business leaders were surprised and disappointed to see the possibility for future economic development stalled by the massive increase in wind turbine setback regulations in 2014's budget bill. The change, which tripled the previous setback requirement, is so restrictive that it disqualifies most or all land area for wind turbine placement.

That means projects are delayed or never begun, resulting in fewer tax dollars for county government, lower revenues to school districts, and lost opportunities for local contractors to engage in big construction projects. In effect, this is red tape blocking economic activity that could otherwise be contributing to the local tax base.

In an era when state and federal assistance to local governments are reduced, we can't afford to tie up actual and potential projects. And we can't afford to wait: each year of lost economic activity strains local budgets and increases the likelihood of local tax increases or reduction of crucial services.

That's why I'm asking you to take immediate action to help. We have an opportunity in this legislation to cut red tape, restore reasonable wind setback rules, and expand economic opportunities to more communities across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on today's legislation.