



April 25, 2019

The Honorable Rep. Paul Zeltwanger
Ohio House of Representatives, 54th District
77 South High St., 12th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Zeltwanger:

I am writing as a proponent for the pending legislation that will reinstate the Rural Industrial Park Loan program (House Bill 98).

Located in southeast Ohio with a population of just under 31,000, Gallia County has not experienced a significant recession recovery as seen in other parts of the state. This, in large part, is due to the scarcity in competitive sites and buildings

The site selection process, which is a major driver of economic growth, identifies sites and buildings that have the necessary utilities and studies in place to minimize risk and maximize speed for industry.

Gallia County, as much of the southern and eastern Ohio region, is currently challenged with an inadequate inventory of quality, marketable light industrial buildings and readily developable sites for projects. Due to this insufficiency, far too often Gallia County is unable to submit a facility or site for project leads, putting our community at an even further disadvantage for economic opportunity.

Previous state programs, such as the Rural Industrial Park Loan Program, Urban & Rural Initiatives, and the Industrial Site Improvement Fund, were utilized with great success to develop speculative sites and buildings in distressed areas of Ohio.

In 2009, Gallia County was awarded a \$750,000 Industrial Site Improvement Fund (ISIF) grant which assisted with the construction of a 20,000 SF speculative building within the Dan Evans Industrial Park. Gallia County experienced great success with this program. Before the building construction was completed, Gallia County entered into a long term lease agreement with a local company, Ohio Valley Trackwork, to occupy the new building. Shortly thereafter, Ohio Valley Trackwork purchased an adjacent lot within the Dan Evans Industrial Park and constructed a second industrial building to further expand their business and create additional jobs.

Unfortunately, since that time, no programs have been in place to fund such initiatives. The Facilities Establishment Fund, which has been receiving loan repayments from previous iterations of development programs, is well-capitalized with roughly \$200,000,000 in the fund.

With an unemployment rate of 6.7%, Gallia County stands at nearly 165% of the State of Ohio's unemployment rate (4.1%). Reinstatement of this critical funding opportunity will not only bring

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positive transformation to many underserved communities but by directing assistance toward the distressed areas, Ohio will have a strong return on investment for the state.

In the short-term, funds will be recouped for the development costs associated with these projects and in the long-term, the taxes generated through commercial activity, sales and income tax will grow Ohio's General Revenue Fund, while employing Ohioans. This program is a win-win.

In relation to economic development, the community must be prepared in a variety of ways to meet a prospective business' needs. The adage, "You can't sell from an empty wagon" still rings true today. In order to be successful, you must have something of value to sell in order for the potential buyer to purchase. Simply put, if our communities do not have an inventory of quality sites and buildings, we do not have a product to market to site selectors and industry.

With limited resources, Gallia County has worked hard to achieve a SiteOhio Authentication status for a 77-acre site within the Dan Evans Industrial Park. With the reinstatement of the Rural Industrial Park Loan (RIPL) program, we hope to continually invest and develop our industrial areas to increase prosperity and job opportunities for Gallia County.

I am supportive of the reinstatement of this important tool for economic development and hope the State of Ohio will commit to making strategic and impactful investments in rural Ohio. Without these vital programs that promote development-ready activity, the economic gap in southern and eastern Ohio will continue to widen, leaving hard-working Ohioans left with less opportunity, lower wages, and our future generations with little hope if they want to remain in our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa Clark".

Melissa Clark
Director
Gallia County Economic Development

CC:

Vice Chair Powell

Ranking Member Sobecki

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