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Honorable Paul Zeltwanger
Economic and Workforce Development Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 12th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

June 19, 2019

Rep. Zeltwanger and Distinguished Committee Members,

Good morning. My name is Patrick Bravo and I am the Executive Director of the Summit County Land Bank, located in Akron, Ohio, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Ohio Land Bank Association. There are, currently, more than 55 land banks established in Ohio. I am here today to advocate on behalf of HB252 and the creation of the Land Reutilization Demolition Program.

While we do not currently have a comprehensive analysis of the number of abandoned and blighted commercial and industrial properties in Ohio, we do know that, as a state, we are looking at millions of square feet in abandoned, blighted, and unsafe space, and millions, potentially billions, more in demolition and cleanup statewide.

Over the last seven (7) years, Ohio communities have been very fortunate to receive federal and state support to combat residential abandonment and blight that has ravaged our communities, even decimating whole neighborhoods, following the recent foreclosure and housing crisis. Unfortunately, where we have fallen short, is supporting local communities in addressing abandoned and blighted commercial and industrial property that is driving down property values, encouraging further disinvestment in neighborhoods and communities, facilitating criminal activity, and impacting public health in ways known, and unknown.

Between 2012 and 2019, the Summit County Land Bank will have spent nearly \$20 million addressing abandoned and blighted residential property. These efforts have been supported, primarily, by then-Attorney General Mike Dewine's Moving Ohio Forward Program and, most recently, with funding through the Ohio Housing Finance Agency's Neighborhood Initiative Program. By the end of this year, this funding will have facilitated the removal of more than 1,600 abandoned and blighted residential properties, in Summit County alone, for which the hope of saving them did not exist because we simply could not get to them fast enough. Along the way, we have fielded complaints from residents regarding health and safety issues including squatting, and we have found evidence of illicit drug use and other criminal activity, as well as the remains of three (3) deceased individuals.



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Our work with local communities in addressing abandoned commercial and industrial property has been much more limited - as abandoned commercial and industrial property often carries significantly more cost for environmental assessment, demolition, and clean-up and remediation activity.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") Office of Policy Development and Research, "...dormant factories, moribund strip malls, and other types of vacant and abandoned properties are among the most visible outward signs of a community's reversing fortunes" (Vacant and Abandoned Properties: Turning Liabilities Into Assets, 2014). Further, "these vacant and abandoned properties are more than just a symptom of larger economic forces at work in the community; their association with crime, increased risk to health and welfare, plunging property values, and escalating municipal costs make them problems in and of themselves, contributing to overall community decline and disinvestment" (id.)

Everyone in this room can probably conjure an image of at least one abandoned and blighted commercial or industrial property, in one or more of their communities that would qualify for this program. From abandoned storefronts, to manufacturing facilities, factories, foundries, warehouses, dry cleaners and gas stations.

In Summit County, we are working with local communities to address abandoned gas stations in Akron, the Village of Richfield, the City of Norton, Springfield Township and the City of Cuyahoga Falls. We are working with the Ohio EPA, U.S. EPA, and the City of Macedonia to address an abandoned anodizing facility that was more than \$3 million tax-delinquent when the land bank stepped in to assist. We have had discussions with the City of Green regarding an abandoned trucking facility and two motels, North of State Route 619, and an old car wash soap and wax manufacturing facility on Mayfair Road, South of Greenburg Road.

In June 2018, the City of Akron launched its vacant building registry aimed at addressing vacant commercial and industrial properties within the city. Currently, the registry lists approximately 203 properties and millions of dollars in tax-delinquency. The City of Akron is working on adding approximately 158 additional properties to that list this year. Of the 203 properties on the list, 111 have been registered by the owners, leaving more than 40% of those properties with unresponsive owners. Using its own funding, the City of Akron has torn down 3 properties, with plans for approximately 9 more this year, representing only 6% of the total current list.

In every community, the lists seem to be growing. We must do what we can to continue to support, and strengthen our local communities. We cannot hide abandoned and blighted commercial and industrial properties. They are front-



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and-center in every community - telling the story of that community before the community even has a chance to tell its own.

This bill will provide communities with a fighting chance and will further the investments that have already been made, at federal, state, and local levels, to address abandonment and blight.

Ohio land banks, and communities, have seen success and we have had real, and substantive, impact in strengthening neighborhoods through the support we have received in addressing abandoned and blighted residential property. We now ask for your support in addressing commercial and industrial property.

Thank you for your time, and your consideration.

Sincerely,

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