

Chairman Zeltwanger, Vice Chair Powell, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 252 which will create a partnership between the State of Ohio and local land banks to provide funding for economic development for some of the most challenging economic development opportunities—abandoned, blighted commercial and industrial properties.

Since 2012, I have personally observed the positive impact demolitions have had in neighborhoods in both the cities of Hamilton and Middletown. In many of the neighborhoods where the demolitions have occurred, there remains blight created by the commercial and industrial properties around which these neighborhoods were built during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

Both cities have been innovative in repurposing some older unique structures, but many are beyond such efforts. The structures are so deteriorated, they are unsafe to enter. There are environmental issues which make them toxic to investors. Additionally, they become a danger to local fire departments as they are likely to be frequent targets of arson which also put adjoining property owners at risk. Local jurisdictions are forced to expend funds for clean ups for illegal dumping at these sites or clean-up of fire debris. Where the properties are ones forfeited to the state or belong to defunct corporations, there is no recouping those funds.

As a former city prosecutor, I am aware of how quickly all vacant and blighted structures become a haven for drug and other illegal activity. There is no one to take responsibility, but there are many Ohioans to suffer the impact created by this blight.

HB 252 provides an opportunity for local jurisdictions to be proactive in dealing with these properties using the legal tools provided by land banks. By creating a match component to the legislation, the partnership provides that both the state and local entities have an investment in making the partnership work for the citizens of Ohio.

While cities have been in the forefront of this issue, the blighted abandoned properties are not limited to cities--they are found in the rural parts of Butler County and other the rest of Ohio. Land banks can provide not only the legal tools at their disposal but also their experience to assist both rural and urban areas where these properties exist. This bill allows the legacy of Ohio's past to be an opportunity to create a new future for this century envisioned and created by today's citizens.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and other members of the committee for the opportunity to address you and your consideration of HB 252.