



**Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz**  
Vice Chair, Lucas County Land Bank  
Mayor of the City of Toledo

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 support of House Bill 252, legislation that will create jobs and strengthen neighborhoods throughout Ohio, including in my community, Toledo.

In 2010, the Lucas County Land Bank was the second county land bank to form in Ohio. Times were much bleaker then. The Great Recession and the foreclosure crisis had hit Ohio hard and Toledo and Lucas County were not spared. Thousands and thousands of abandoned properties riddled our neighborhoods. Not just abandoned houses, but abandoned industrial hulks and commercial buildings too.

As our Land Bank's incorporator and founding Board member, I have seen what a tremendous difference it has made in the last 9 years. Our Land Bank has helped take control of over 6,000 abandoned properties, demolishing 3,600 of the worst, but rehabbing another 700 and transferring 1,500 side lots to committed neighbors. We've done this by leveraging over \$50 million of private & public investment. In almost every neighborhood in Toledo and every community in Lucas County, the Land Bank has made a lasting impact.

But, there's more work to do. Although we are deeply grateful to then Attorney General DeWine for directing settlement dollars toward residential demolition in 2012, and to our federal delegation for allowing Hardest Hit Funds to be spent on blight elimination since 2014, it simply isn't enough. Now is the time for the State of Ohio to invest in this important work, and House Bill 252 is an excellent first step.

House Bill 252 will create jobs by demolishing sites that will never be redeveloped while the dirty, empty, and obsolete buildings of the past remain. We estimate that there are at least 300 of these abandoned commercial buildings in just Toledo alone.

Let me give you an example: just down the road from where I grew up is a 100-year-old, 7-story apartment building. It has been abandoned for at least a decade. All of its windows are broken and all of its entrances are boarded. But people still get in. And three years ago this month, a 16-year-old student fell to his death in its open elevator shaft while playing with friends in this building.

That young man's story is a tragedy, but it is a tragedy that could have been avoided. If communities have the resources to remove these dangerous buildings once and for all, "kids being kids" will not lead to such awful ends.

And while removing these buildings to avoid tragedy is critical, removing these buildings to position them for investment is also key. This same apartment building is on a site less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile from I-75. No one wants to rent an apartment there anymore, but many might want that site for logistics, light industrial, or other modern business needs. What we know from the private sector, however, is that sites that aren't "shovel ready" are simply not attractive or cost-effective. It is up to us, the public, to make that investment first.

But that is also why House Bill 252 is a cost-effective solution. It's not a free ride for places like Toledo. We have to put up real money to match your dollars. And I am confident that we will if you help us by taking the first step and passing this bill.

County land banks, now numbering 54 in Ohio, are uniquely positioned to take advantage of these dollars and make a lasting difference. I know that our Land Bank will create jobs and strengthen neighborhoods if you pass House Bill 252. The record speaks for itself.

I will leave you with this quote from a May Toledo Blade editorial on House Bill 252:

“While there are many competing demands for state funds, money spent to eliminate the blight of abandoned buildings pays many dividends ... [and] without flexible funds to clean them up, places like northwest Ohio will continue to lose opportunities for renewal.”

Thank you Chairman Zeltwanger, Vice Chair Powell, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, thank for your consideration and I am happy to answer any further questions at this time.