

House Bill 401
Opponent Testimony
Cathy Cowan Becker

Chairman Vitale and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am volunteer chair of Ready for 100 in Ohio. Ready for 100 is a program of the Sierra Club that works with cities transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy. So far 141 cities have made this commitment including three in Ohio – Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Lakewood.

I am here to testify in opposition to House Bill 401, a bill that would allow wind energy developments to be blocked even after they have begun. The wind industry in Ohio is already under attack from draconian setback legislation that does not exist in any other state. This legislation would kill off what is left of the wind industry in Ohio by subjecting it to hurdles not required for any other form of energy.

House Bill 401 would allow opponents to require township referendums on new or even slightly altered wind farms even after these projects get approval from the Ohio Power Siting Board. No developer is going to propose a wind project of any sort if it is to be subjected to such whims and uncertainties.

No other form of energy is subjected to such requirements. In Ohio, I have seen fracking rigs not 20 feet from a farm house. Oil pipelines are allowed to run through residential neighborhoods. The people of Broadview Heights were not allowed to use zoning to keep fracking away from a school house. After Toledo passed a community bill of rights, this legislature immediately gutted it in the next state budget.

Why is wind energy in Ohio under such sustained attack? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the fastest-growing job in the country is wind turbine technician. Yet the Ohio legislature dreams up one way after another to chase these jobs out of Ohio. Why?? Look at a map of wind energy developments in the Midwest. You'll see lots in Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania – and practically nothing in Ohio.

Wind energy makes money for farmers – just ask farmers in Texas and Iowa. It provides revenue streams that support schools – just ask Van Wert County. It provides clean energy with none of the serious health effects of fracking and doesn't spill like oil.

Wind energy projects, just like every other energy project, already have a lengthy approval process through the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and the Ohio Power Siting Board.

Further, renewable energy, including wind, enjoys large majorities of public support, even in Ohio.

An October poll by the Yale Program for Climate Change Communication found that 63% of Ohioans think developing more renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, should be the most important priority for addressing Ohio's energy needs. Additionally, 68% of Ohio voters say the state should eliminate its 2014 wind setback law.

Meanwhile, 76% of Ohioans say that requiring that 100% of electricity in the state be generated by renewable sources by 2050 will have a positive impact on the state's environment, and 69% say this policy will improve Ohioans' health. 60% say that a state standard of 100% renewable energy would improve the economy, and 56% think it would have a positive impact on rural and farming communities.

During my work on Ready for 100 across Ohio, I have had the opportunity to talk with city officials from all over the state who are considering a transition to 100% renewable energy. All of them want to see more renewable energy in the state. Currently there are few utility scale wind projects available in Ohio where they can purchase renewable energy. That means these cities must buy renewable energy certificates, or carbon offsets, for renewable energy generated in other states.

Think about that. We have cities in Ohio that are sending their money to wind farms in Texas because the energy they want is not available in their own state – and now we have legislation that would make any future wind energy development in Ohio impossible. That is a travesty.

Just this week, as every country in the world is meeting to discuss their climate commitments, a new report states again the dire situation of the climate crisis. The latest report says we must cut carbon emissions by 7.6 percent every year if we are to have a chance at a livable planet. This is on the heels of a report stating we have 10 years to cut carbon emissions in half, and another report stating that we have 120% more fossil fuel energy in reserves than we can safely develop.

There is simply no way to have a livable planet without transitioning to renewable energy, and wind energy is among the cheapest, cleanest, and most abundant energy anywhere.

Do you have children? Do you know anyone under the age of 30? Those people who you know will likely still be alive in 2050. We are headed to a world where it will be hard to grow food, hard to find clean water, where large parts of the population are subjected to devastating floods, droughts, fires and storms, with seas inundating coasts, up to 1 billion climate refugees, and 1 million species going extinct.

Is that the world you want to leave for your kids? Is that what you want to see happen in the next couple of decades? Because that's where legislation like this will take us.

Many of our city officials are working very hard to ensure that their children have a livable planet. If the Ohio legislature passes this law, you are telling them, as well as your own children, to go to hell.

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