

## House Bill 476

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee; thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 476.

Our Parks system in Stark County is very aggressive in it's pursuit of land acquisition and has continually ignored the concerns of land owners. One of the concerns property owners have is that they display our properties on future trail maps. The parks publications and brochures indicate that these trails will be completed by certain dates. When park employees are asked that if the landowners have no intention of selling their property do they plan on invoking eminent domain, it is always followed with "the parks have never used this". The fact is they have verbally threatened some land owners with it as can be shown in public testimony under House Bill 288. With the power of eminent domain, land owners are left to assume that their property will be taken which leaves future plans in jeopardy.

Our park district has continually made the claim that the only reason they need eminent domain is for their protection against other entities. I asked them if they would consider supporting this bill to show in good faith that they have no intentions of taking property. This bill would be perfect for that scenario as it does not eliminate the power for their protection, it simply offers protection to the landowners. They refused to support the bill stating they do not lobby legislation, which in fact they did just that for HB 288.

Many landowners in Stark County are fearful that the park district will follow through with their plans taking our land for the completion of trails. I ask this committee to please give landowners the protection to personal property that our founders afforded to all of us.

Josh Staley,  
Stark County