



HB 444 – Township Omnibus Bill
House State and Local Government Committee
Proponent Testimony
June 8, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. My name is Bob Kusmer, Ballville Township Trustee in Sandusky County. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony as a proponent of House Bill 444, the township omnibus bill. I will concentrate on the transfer of cemeteries.

Ohio townships presently maintain over 2400 cemeteries. Under the Ohio Revised Code, 517.27 “Transfer of cemeteries to board of township trustees” a township is required to take title to all cemeteries abandoned and pay for their costs. We are now facing a new financial concern in regard to the abandonment of cemeteries.

We are seeing this section of law being implemented as part of a business plan by these large privately owned associations. As profits dry up over the years, maintenance and operating costs become a liability upon the association. When these cemeteries are no longer financially viable, they abandon them and the monetary encumbrance becomes the township’s problem.

This situation is what my residents are facing in the near future. Oakwood Cemetery is a privately owned association that is approximately 43 acres with over 25,000 graves. It has been neglected and mismanaged over the past fifteen years. Based upon the association treasurer’s report in 2018, the cemetery is losing \$95,000 a year, and now wants to abandon the cemetery and give it to the township. There is over 2 miles of roads in disrepair. Storm sewers are collapsed due to their negligence. Also, over 2,500 head stone that have been damaged and are in need of replacement or repair. The estimated cost to bring this facility up to standard is between \$1,500,000.00 and \$2,000,000.00 dollars. This responsibility will become Ballville Township residents’ problem as the association goes away. The cemetery has \$700,000 in its account as of 2018, but they plan to keep the money and invest it for the Township. We would receive the interest of approximately \$22,000 annually and the cemetery burdens.

We have a general fund budget of \$300,000 annually. This means 33% of my budget will have to be dedicated to the operating cost of just one cemetery. This does not include any infrastructure costs. With the rest of my budget, I have to maintain our five other cemeteries, three parks, a zoning department and the overhead for our facilities.