

Opponent Testimony of Courtney Heiser on Ohio Senate Bill 234
OSU Student and Seneca County Resident
Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, Chair Steve Wilson
February 11, 2020

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee: thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony as an opponent to Senate Bill 234. My name is Courtney Heiser and I am an Agricultural Communications student at The Ohio State University as well as a resident of Seneca County.

My family would like to develop our farm to produce clean energy and generate new income as part of a Seneca County project, but SB 234 would impede our property rights. This proposal threatens to pull the rug out from under landowners who wish to host wind turbines on their own land.

Coming from a rural area that has plans for wind project development, I understand the benefits of wind and other renewable energy projects: due to variable weather conditions, more than 1.5 million acres of Ohio farmland went unplanted in 2019. Existing wind projects have resulted in millions of dollars in annual land lease payments to landowners – allowing farmers to recover lost revenue.

My family owns several hundred acres of farmland across Seneca County, and the wind energy project has proposed to construct turbines on our land. Although we will not be able to farm a certain percentage of our acreage, the supplemental rent payments for the use of the land would be an additional benefit—especially in the adverse planting conditions and the continued trade war with China over the past year.

However, the effect of SB 234 would be to block and discourage wind development, harming my family's ability to diversify our income.

Another consideration is that as a student in the College of Food, Ag, and Environmental Sciences at OSU, I had the opportunity to take a class on Rural Sociology. One of the most interesting topics we discussed was the rural brain drain crisis – a dilemma causing young adults to move from their rural hometowns to industrialized urban areas for better jobs and other opportunities.

One of the main goals for the Seneca Wind Project is to create value for Seneca County. This will help to mitigate the rural brain drain crisis. According to Alan Borst from USDA Rural Development, wind energy produces more jobs per watt than all other energy sources, including oil and coal. Specifically, for Seneca County, the wind project will provide \$56 million in PILOT revenues to be shared among schools, townships, the county and the state over the life of the project. This investment will give young people an incentive to remain rural residents. Unfortunately, SB 234 would inhibit job and economic growth, not only in my area but also across the entire state.

For the sake of my family farm and hundreds of others who want to harvest the wind, please do not pass SB 234. It's time for Ohio to take the lead in renewable energy investment and not lose these opportunities to other states. I ask that you set Ohio on a clear path of allowing farmers to diversify their income through renewable energy development by not supporting SB 234.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.