

Ken Amstutz
Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 49
Senate Finance Subcommittee on General Government and Agency Review
Chairman Kris Jordan
Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on General Government and Agency Review, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as an interested party to House Bill 49.

My name is Ken Amstutz and I am the Superintendent of the Van City Schools in Van Wert County in Northwest Ohio and I urge you to support House Bill 49 to allow for more investment in our community and county. The bill is fundamentally about economic development, attracting investment to our state, and job-creation in Van Wert County and Northwest Ohio.

The Van Wert City Schools serves over 2,100 students from grades PK through 12 in central Van Wert County with a district that spans 71 square miles. In the past five years, the Van Wert City Schools has become the innovative center for the area and State. Our middle school and high school students have great opportunities through Project Based Learning, STEM and Project Lead the Way. Our course offerings include Pre-Engineering, Bio-Medical, Robotics and Gateway to Technology and we are looking to expand our technology course offerings at Van Wert High School to meet the needs and demands of local employers. We receive frequent visits from school districts across the State, including the Ohio Department of Education, to see first-hand the great things we are doing academically.

Our curriculum is ever evolving and expanding despite the fact we have seen our General Fund balance decrease from \$6.4M to \$2.8M during Fiscal Years 2011 to 2014. We narrowly ended Fiscal Year 2015 in the black, which is the first time in five years. During this same time period, our neighboring school districts have experienced much growth due in part to revenues generated by the Blue Creek Wind Farm operated by Avangrid Renewables. They receive more than \$1 million annually which the Van Wert City Schools does not benefit from. House Bill 49 would allow for wind farm expansion with Apex Clean Energy in our school district to give us additional revenue to continue to expand upon the innovative educational opportunities for our students.

In Northwest Ohio we boast that we are the "Wind Capital of Ohio," one of the few natural resources we can take advantage of, but unfortunately Ohio has a major policy barrier that blocks this growth: wind farm setbacks. This could easily be resolved at no cost to the state or our community. House Bill 49 addresses this policy barrier to wind farm development in Ohio, enabling communities that want wind farms the opportunity to have them. If counties would like to see additional wind farm development, they can make the choice to do so.

We have seen the positive contributions of the wind farms in our neighboring communities: new money for farmers/land owners and local government, a new revenue stream for school districts, a company like Avangrid who is willing to give donations to our school and students, and the opportunity to make a difference with a renewable energy in-state. The current setbacks go too far, and takes away the property rights of those who want to see wind development on their land.

It is my understanding that there is growing interest from private companies, especially high technology data companies such as Amazon and Apple, to purchase renewable energy and develop in our state. These companies take their corporate sustainability plans extremely seriously and are demanding renewable energy, procured from projects built in the state in which they do business. If Ohio doesn't take advantage of these wind energy opportunities, other states will. As renewable energy prices have fallen, these deals have become more attractive financially and of course, with no fuel costs, the power price is guaranteed not to change for the duration of the contract—often twenty years - an enormous benefit to businesses that like long term predictability.

Passage of House Bill 49 would offer many potential wins for Ohio, our community and the Van Wert City Schools:

1. A new wind farm would mean more revenue for our farmers from harvesting the wind in addition to traditional crops.
2. A new wind farm would mean additional revenue for our local government and schools, including the Van Wert City Schools.
3. A new wind farm would create additional wind technician jobs, which could be filled by our students.
4. A new wind farm could supply clean, affordable, stable-priced wind energy to a new data center customer in the state, which would have its own benefits from a large investment and local tax revenues.

Please support House Bill 49 to allow counties to make the choice locally to try to achieve these potential benefits.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on House Bill 49 and I would be pleased to answer any questions.