

Senate Finance – General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee
Testimony of Neil Voje
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Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 49

Chairman Jordan, Vice Chairman O'Brien, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to present interested party testimony on House Bill 49. I am Neil Voje, a retired Navy Special Operations Officer and the head of operations for Avangrid Renewables Blue Creek Wind Farm. Blue Creek is a 152 turbine wind farm totaling 304 MW in Van Wert and Paulding Counties. The purpose of my testimony is to provide the committee with a first-hand account of the benefits Blue Creek provides to its host communities and our experience operating a commercial scale wind farm in Northwest Ohio. It is our view that wind farms like Blue Creek safely provide significant economic benefits to their host communities and that the Committee should restore Ohio's wind setback requirements to the standards consistent with those present at the time of Blue Creek's construction. This initiative will enable more Ohio communities to take advantage of the same benefits enjoyed by Blue Creek's host communities.

Blue Creek was the largest single private investment in Ohio in 2011 at \$600 million, it put more than 30 Ohio companies and 500 people to work on construction, and for nearly five years it has been churning out clean energy and local benefits. We generate about eight hundred million kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. This electricity requires no water and creates no air emissions, and it is affordable. Another significant benefit that potential customers tell us is the price stability of the wind energy contract. We don't pay for fuel, so our price can be locked in for a long term like twenty years. Local benefits are significant: we are the largest taxpayer in Van Wert County, and local school districts are directly benefitting, and investing in additional technologies for their students. Our landowner partners enjoy the new source of revenue as they deal with a roller coaster of commodity prices and bad weather, among other challenges. Landowner payments are currently \$2.4 million annually, part of the roughly \$5 million the wind farm injects directly into the communities each year.

Community participation has been essential to Blue Creek's success. There are over 250 families participating in the project either through wind energy lease agreements or other easement agreements. There are more neighbor agreements at Blue Creek than any other Avangrid Renewables wind farm, and we operate nearly 60 in 22 states. The project exceeded the property line and a residential setback requirement required at the time and has been operating safely with little public concern since its operation began in 2011.

I will conclude by offering some information on Blue Creek's operations. To date, the project has received 26 total complaints including two in 2016. That is over nearly five years of operating 152 turbines. Seventeen were related to television reception and those have been resolved favorably for the citizens. Five complaints have been for shadow flicker and four were for sound including the two

newest– all the complaints have been resolved. As I mentioned above, Blue Creek was permitted prior to the restrictive setbacks imposed by House Bill 484. Had the setback rules currently in place been used to build Blue Creek, even with 250 lease agreements, only about 12 of the 152 would fit the requirements, and probably would not have been constructed at all.

I believe this operational record demonstrates that commercial scale wind farms can positively coexist in Ohio's rural communities under a siting and setback regime that allows for the economic siting of wind farms. It is worth the committee's time to consider that the Van Wert Chamber of Commerce estimates over 1 Billion dollars is awaiting approval of wind project construction by Avangrid Renewables and other wind companies, all on hold for setback laws. I can think of no other company waiting to infuse that much money into Van Wert County, OH.

I respectfully request this committee consider legislation restoring the setback language found in statute prior to the passage of House Bill 483 in 2014.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions at this time.