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Opponent Testimony on Substitute House Bill 6
Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Chairman Steve Wilson
Testimony of Nathan A. Strum
Executive Director for GROW Licking County

June 19, 2019

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on Substitute House Bill 6.

My name is Nathan A. Strum, and I serve as Executive Director for GROW Licking County CIC, a 501-c-3 public-private partnership in Licking County, Ohio that serves as the front door to our community for economic development opportunities. **Economic development organizations are at the forefront of advocating for the growth of our communities**, and in today's climate, we recognize that **energy is an increasingly important to business attraction and retention**.

In particular, renewable **energy such as wind and solar** are important to communities across the state, including ours.

A word about why: Located thirty minutes to the east of downtown Columbus, Licking County does not have wind resources suitable for locating wind farms. However, what we do have is a diverse economy which includes manufacturing-based backbone as well as technology-driven investments. These include data center investments from Google, Facebook, and Amazon Web Services as well as e-commerce investments from Amazon. We'd like to have more!

Amazon's investment in central Ohio is part of a broader trend: corporate purchasers of wind and solar energy are beginning to outnumber utility purchasers, and the ability to purchase utility scale renewable energy is increasingly important to corporate site selection. According to a National Geographic article dated March 7, 2016¹, some the largest consumers of renewable energy include Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple. However, **it's not just tech firms who want to buy clean power, but also traditional employers: many large-scale manufacturing companies are turning to renewable energy to meet internal goals of greenhouse gas reductions** (among others). In Licking County, two of our top three largest employers – Amazon.com and **Owens Corning Fiberglas** – rank in the top eight of this study (Amazon.com at No. 2 and Owens-Corning Fiberglas at No. 8), and the rest of the list reads as a who's who in Ohio manufacturing, including **Dow Chemical** (No. 10), **Proctor & Gamble** (No. 13), **General Motors** (No. 19), and **Lockheed Martin** (No. 20).

Corporate procurement of clean energy continues to grow, doubling from 2013 to 2014 and doubling again from 2014 to 2015. In 2015, for the first time, Fortune 500 companies and other non-utility customers contracted for more than half of the wind power in America.

(next page)

¹ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/energy/2016/03/160307-top-companies-buying-wind-and-solar-energy/>



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Our communities are strong because private industry wants to invest in us. Increasingly, **access to renewable energy is becoming part of the site selection process – as much as other critical factors such as workforce, transportation and infrastructure.** A growing number of companies today, when considering a site for new or expanded facilities, consider whether it will enable them to fulfill their clean energy sourcing policies: they want access to clean power or the ability to develop it.

In today's highly competitive business climate, Ohio can't afford to hurt its standing in the eyes of company leaders who decide where to invest. The Buckeye State can be an attractive, but we are losing opportunities because of this shortcoming. **If our community (or state) does not enable reasonable access to the development of renewable energy, companies will pursue opportunities elsewhere – putting much more than renewable energy investments at risk.**

With that in mind, I urge the Committee to eliminate any language from House Bill 6 that restricts, disqualifies or in any way presents roadblocks or weakens renewable energy development or renewable energy standards.

Furthermore, based on the continued success of wind energy in attracting new investment to Ohio, I ask you to consider no new energy bill without including the restoration of reasonable wind siting regulations so that developers are not hindered by the current, burdensome setbacks. Changed in 2014, the wind turbine property line setback to approximately 1,300 feet disqualifies most or all land area within the footprint of new wind projects for turbine placement, destroying their financial viability. The effect has been to greatly harm wind development in recent years.

Additionally, the bill should eliminate any wind project local vote provision as this is an over-reach and government-imposed barrier to block wind farm development. As Sarah E. Hunt is CEO of the Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy recently shared: "What smart, innovative company will attempt to build new electricity infrastructure in Ohio, only to face a fatal referendum after millions have already been spent on the approval process and construction? This burdensome regulation, coupled with the oppressive, arbitrary wind turbine siting setback law, will eliminate jobs that new wind projects can bring to rural communities."

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Nathan A. Strum
nstrum@growlickingcounty.org
740-345-9757 ext. 3