

Substitute House Bill 6 Proponent Party Testimony
Jeff Harmon, Harrison Township Trustee, Van Wert County, Ohio
June 19, 2019

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent testimony on Substitute House Bill 6.

I am providing testimony in support of the provision of this bill that allows a township referendum on wind development in the rural community. We call this the "Reineke Referendum" because Representative Reineke worked with the local community to develop this language on behalf of all disenfranchised Northwest Ohioans who are the people affected by wind development. This is a fair compromise that restores a balance of power between the community and the developer.

I have served just under 16 years, 4 terms, as one of Harrison Township's trustees. I was also the president of the Van Wert County Township Association for over 8 years and presently sit on the executive committee. My testimony is on behalf of my constituents and not on behalf of the Harrison Township Trustees. Why? Because many Trustees in various townships across Ohio's impacted counties, like Harrison Township, disagree among themselves.

In other jurisdictions, trustees are leaseholders who have signed contracts or easements. Conflicts of interest impede a Trustee's ability to speak on behalf of their Board and also impede their ability, as a Board, to participate as intervenors in siting cases before the Ohio Power Siting Board. It is not right that citizens, the local electorate, should be denied representation in wind cases at the state and local level.

I have been personally involved in wind development since Blue Creek came to fruition in 2006. Throughout this entire time frame many of my constituents and other county residents have expressed a desperate desire to have more of a place at the table in these types of developments. Giving the people the opportunity to express their will via the referendum is the right thing to do. The current process does not work.

As many of you know, the rural community is zoned agricultural and residential. It is my strong opinion that township residents and large landowning farmers should have more of a voice in this process. As a township trustee who talks to many people across Van Wert County, it is my strong belief that a pathway to a local referendum is strongly desired by the rural community. That way, industrial wind development, can proceed where it is desired by those who will live inside or near a project footprint. We all have equal property rights under the law and this provision of the bill guarantees it.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide my insight on this issue.