

SUB. HOUSE BILL 6
INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY
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June 27, 2019

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Aichholz and I write my testimony to you today after a reviewing the latest version of HB-6 yesterday afternoon. I along with thousands of people in Seneca, Erie, Huron, Sandusky, and Crawford Counties were extremely disappointed to see the portion that allowed for a local referendum on “Wind Farms” was purposefully and completely removed. This provision is not only import to this area but it is essential, and removing it has now captured the attention of many who are left wondering why?

This provision that our State Representative Bill Reineke worked so hard to have included in this bill has been thoughtfully crafted, drawing on much experience with industrial wind turbine (IWT) development. Today, you should know that our area is formally planned to be inundated with around 250 square miles of IWT sprawl that if built would leave our area changed forever. Any plans we had for economic development, future land use, private property rights would be greatly impacted for the next 30+ years. The referendum’s ultimate goal was to give communities like ours the opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of IWT development and cast a vote that best reflected our wishes.

Most communities have a strategic land use plan in place that has been collaborated on by the community and its leaders. These plans are shaped over decades and instill the areas cultures and values and are continually updated and reviewed. These plans are in place to serve as a road map on how a given area would like to see their community grow and prosper. It includes the types of businesses and industry that are desired, outlines the importance of maintaining and expanding our pristine nature preserves, and ultimately seeks to minimize any potential land use conflicts. All of these things are currently under attack in our area with the IWT projects and how they have been developed and planned. These projects had very little if any public input with much of the development being designed without the general public’s knowledge. There has been a complete disregard for our future economic development by placing as many as 10+ IWTs in areas that will negatively degrade the use of our growing local airports. Our local park district has had to spend their precious dollars on legal counsel to fight to push back 30+ IWT’s that are set to surround several of our nature preserves.

The current process via the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) affords communities facing issues like this an extremely limited opportunity to voice their concerns. Counties, Townships, and local citizens, if interested, must spend endless amounts of legal dollars just to officially be a part of the process. Then, with no assurance that their voices will truly even matter, they must spend more money during the intervention process. All of this will be avoided if you include the referendum process in HB-6. If you do this you will be giving a voice back to our community, its people, and our leaders.

You have heard testimony that this referendum provision creates yet another unreasonable hurdle for IWT developers and discourages them from investing in Ohio. This is no more than an attempt to once again have our local voices suppressed. The wind industry has gotten comfortable with not having to be concerned with local residents, leaders, and community planning, and worry only about the current OPSB process. It would force them to spend additional effort in meeting with the community and its leaders and explaining plans for their projects at the very beginning. This would ensure community input, clarity on all aspects of the project from the beginning which would be a win-win situation for not only the community but the developer.

The important fact that exists with this referendum is that it allows communities the opportunity to give the official green-light on a given project. If a community supports the development of IWT projects it can take the OPSB's final decision in stride, or if challenged via petition and referendum, they will be able to soundly win with the majority of the community voting to allow construction to begin. There are areas in Ohio that tout all of the great things these projects bring along with them and Reineke's Referendum guarantees that these communities can continue to enjoy these benefits. Recently we have heard the Ohio Conservative Energy Forum and Tyler Duvelius state that a recent poll they conducted has shown overwhelming support for wind and renewables. If this truly is the case, then the referendum processes will prove-out their talking points and polling.

In closing today I urge you to reconsider the referendum provision and have it included into HB-6 in an effort to give back local Ohio residents the opportunity to have a voice in how their communities will develop over the next 30+ years. We need a place in the process and the only legitimate way to ensure this is including Reineke's Referendum in HB-6.