

Proponent Testimony by Grace Gallucci  
Chair, Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium/Vibrant NEO  
House Agriculture and Conservation Committee  
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Chairman Koehler, Vice Chair Creech, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the Agriculture and Conservation Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 83, on behalf of the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium, also known as Vibrant NEO. SB 83 would require the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA), in conjunction with Ohio public universities, to conduct a comprehensive statewide study to determine the locations of brownfield sites throughout Ohio, and provide an assessment of these sites. I am pleased that this legislation has passed the Senate, and I urge this Committee and the Ohio House to approve this legislation. Brownfield identification, assessment, and remediation are key tools for economic development and job creation.

Vibrant NEO is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization for 12 counties of Northeast Ohio focused on building vibrant communities that are financially and environmentally sustainable. Participants in the creation of Vibrant NEO included the counties of Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, and Wayne. From 2010 to 2014, stakeholders across the 12 county region worked together to create “Vibrant NEO 2040 – A vision and framework report”. In 2015, the American Planning Association honored us with their award for best comprehensive plan in the country.

Remediating brownfields is one of 9 recommendations outlined in Vibrant NEO 2040. This plan strives to strengthen established communities, increase transportation choice, preserve and protect natural resources, and promote collaboration and efficiency. Brownfield identification and assessment, to prepare for remediation and redevelopment, will help accomplish this vision for Northeast Ohio. Performing a thorough identification and assessment of brownfield sites must happen before meaningful cleanup can begin. This bill represents a critical step forward.

There is a tremendous need for brownfield assessment and remediation in the 12-county Vibrant NEO region. Identifying and remediating brownfields creates more shovel-ready sites for economic development and job creation while also protecting farms and forests. Brownfields exist in established communities of all sizes, and they are well-served by existing infrastructure. If they are not identified and remediated, development will either not happen or will take place on sites that are underserved by infrastructure -- increasing the burden on taxpayers to pay for new roads, sewers, and other necessities. Neither of these options is desirable for long-term financial sustainability and quality of life.

For Ohio to remain competitive and increase job opportunities, we must address the numerous brownfield sites throughout the state, and make these sites amenable to development that will create opportunities for economic development and sustainable growth. I should note that the \$150,000 allocated through this bill is unlikely to be sufficient to allow OEPA to carry out the

work needed for a comprehensive statewide assessment, and I would support a higher funding level if supported by the sponsors of this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.