



**House Agriculture & Conservation Committee  
Proponent Testimony, Senate Bill 83 (Williams – Rulli)  
Jason Warner, Director of Strategic Engagement, Greater Ohio Policy Center  
Wednesday, June 23, 2021**

Chairman Koehler, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 83, legislation authorizing a study of the pervasiveness of brownfields across the State of Ohio.

My name is Jason Warner, and I am the Director of Strategic Engagement with the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC). GOPC is a statewide, non-partisan not-for-profit organization. GOPC's mission is to improve the communities of Ohio through smart growth strategies and research. Our vision is a revitalized Ohio.

For those of you who are unaware or unfamiliar with brownfields, the term is generally applied to any previously developed site that is not currently in use that is environmentally contaminated.

Generally, brownfield sites exist in a city's or towns industrial sector, commonly found at abandoned factories or commercial buildings. However, they can also be found in residential neighborhoods as well. They can be as small as a former stand-alone dry-cleaning business or mechanic's shop to as large as an abandoned hospital or steel mill.

Brownfields can inhibit a community's ability to renovate, rebuild or revitalize an industrial, commercial, or residential neighborhood. Their existence drives down property values and can contribute to poor public health.

More problematic however, is that while some sites are obvious, others are not as clear to the naked eye. While all of us here today can think of some property in our communities that would qualify – others are not as apparent. The passage of time can sometimes lead to properties slipping under the radar and confusion over what, if any, contamination may exist on a property. Sadly, some properties will never be revealed to be a brownfield until actual redevelopment activity may get underway. It is not unheard of for a previous property owner to have buried hazardous materials which seep into the soil or for work to have been undertaken on a property that is not publicly disclosed at the time of a sale.

Senate Bill 83 seeks to address this issue by providing for a study by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to conduct, in conjunction with Ohio public universities, a study to determine where brownfield sites are located in Ohio, estimate the cost of performing the clean-up of the identified brownfield site, identifying sources to support the clean-up of the brownfield sites, and develop recommendations for changes to state and local laws and policies that would help facilitate the clean-up of the identified brownfield sites.

As a longtime advocate for the remediation of brownfield sites in Ohio, GOPC recognizes the benefits of such a study. It is important to note however, that what Senate Bill 83 is not a panacea. **It will not help us to identify every brownfield site in Ohio. It will also not prevent any new brownfield sites from ever being created. It certainly will not help to make these sites suitable for redevelopment.**

**What Senate Bill 83 will do is to provide us with a snapshot of the current state of brownfields in Ohio**, following more than a decade of absence of remediation funding available from the state. It will be nearly impossible for such a research project to identify every possible brownfield site in Ohio, and the ebb and flow of the marketplace means that the list will never be complete; however, Senate Bill 83 will help answer the question GOPC hears most often when discussing brownfields: How many are there and are there any in my district.

While it is easy to answer the second part of that question (**YES**), it is often difficult to answer the first, without a starting point inventory.

While we hope to have the opportunity to discuss further with all of you the long term needs of funding the revitalization of brownfields, either through consideration of Senate Bill 84 or House Bill 143, which is pending in the Finance Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to be before you today to discuss the importance of identifying these scourges of economic progress across the state of Ohio.

Chairman Koehler, members of the Agriculture and Conservation Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.