

To the Ohio House of Representatives

To Chair Kohler, Vice Chair Creech and Ranking Member Brent

RE: HB 592 The Youth Urban Farmer Initiative

Hello, my Name is Sonia Flunder-McNair. I am the owner of Sonia Organics and the Executive Director of Urban Wholistics in Toledo, Ohio. I am writing to share my story.

I almost lost my life from an infection after having surgery. I left the hospital after almost a month stay, on morphine and IV antibiotics, finally to be released weighing under 100lbs.

As soon as I got home, I went straight to my 4x4 garden bed that grew; kale, cucumber, St. John's Wort, mint and a collard green plant. I remember eating a leaf of dinosaur kale and loving how it made me feel. And, drinking a cup of St. John's Wort for my pain and depression instead of pain pills. Before my life changing health encounter I only looked for food outside of my community, in a restaurant or in a fast food line. Never before now have I ever thought about using food as medicine. Being so weak from my hospital stay being able to jump on the expressway to get food wasn't as easy as it used to be.

I remember how the food from my garden gave me powerful feelings of healing and hope on the inside. My body was able to appreciate why local food was valuable not only to a starving community but also to a body in recovery.

After I heal I had to tell others about food and the need of more trees, bees and gardens but didn't really know how. I live in the center city of Toledo, Ohio, The Junction, where there are many diet related illnesses, mental health and environmental traumas that can be addressed simply by changing the environment in which we live and to be educated about food and it's benefits as soon as we're able to consume it.

I decided to protest food insecurity, lack of locally grown access to real nutrient dense foods and move into action by taking a small piece of Toledo back by not only upbuilding the land and securing a local food movement but to also bring back social cohesion bonds and networks among neighbors and the people who desire to participate in urban farming.

Through my work and partnering with other likeminded individuals have been able to accomplish a total facelift for community. Our program is a pilot that all communities could benefit from.

Tatum Park at 1209 City Park in Toledo, Ohio houses our Urban Farm where we teach youth the importance of the foods they eat, and how to grow what they are unable to access.

Trees and open land development is important in areas like ours and other lacking urban areas that has little to no urban tree canopies and local food hubs. According to the U. S. Department of Agriculture an ideal percentage of urban tree cover is beneficial to urban areas for many

reasons, such as removal of harmful city pollutants, slowing traffic, reducing warming and promoting greater physical activity.

We now have the data for the first time to help show whether a neighborhoods tree canopy meets USDA goals, or is below or above it.

My city would agree that Urban Wholistics mission is a global one. We are in talks with other counties to duplicate our Wholistic Green Space, Tatum Park. Tatum Park has another entity called Urban South Youth Farmers Market where we teach the equitable part of urban agriculture.

It brings back the mom & pop feel of community and also a chance for other entrepreneurs to join in in selling or bartering for food or product. Farm to table and Farm to Product is what we pride ourselves in.

We have accomplished getting a shed on our land, a high tunnel, and a space just for Preschoolers and Kindergarteners can learn basic self-reliant skills. Last season we had 60 children to sign up and to participate. This year we have started off with even more momentum and have added a second day to our existing program.

I invite you to come see what we are doing and urge the house to push forward HB 592 The Youth Urban Farmer Initiative. It is what our youth, our future needs.

Sincerely,

Sonia Flunder-McNair