



December 5, 2022

Committee Members,

Chairman Stephens, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Weinstein and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 685. My name is Ben Vollrath and I am President of the Logan County Chamber of Commerce located just 1-hour northwest of downtown Columbus along the growing US33 Smart Corridor. I serve as the economic development lead for our community as we look to attract new business and grow our existing business base. I am also fortunate to serve as a Board member for the Mid Ohio Development Exchange, which is the professional development organization serving the 11-county Columbus Region of economic developers. My background is in the utility industry having worked for six years for Dayton Power & Light in community and economic development.

Between my time at the utility and now in local development, I have seen firsthand the importance of having prepared communities. The saying we often use in the Columbus Region is that "prepared communities win." Winning largely means retaining and attracting jobs that improve the quality of life and the prosperity of an area and its people. Preparation that paves the way for business expansions and new business attraction requires not just finding available land, implementing proper zoning, and fostering a community supportive of growth. Preparation largely hinges on infrastructure and having excess utility capacity. Roads, water, sewer, fiber, electric, and natural gas. Not just having them onsite but having excess capacity so new users can come and get up and running quickly.

In Logan County we have done significant amounts of preparation and now have three active industrial parks offering combined over 250 acres of land properly zoned for industrial development. These properties have roads into the park, water, sewer, fiber, electric, and natural gas lines all on site. For our two primary parks in the City of Bellefontaine there are over 2 million gallons/day of water and sewer capacity available thanks to investments by our community. In one of the parks two 100,000 square foot speculative industrial buildings were just constructed with support from JobsOhio. The issue now is natural gas. The industrial parks and buildings cannot support much more than warehousing or lite manufacturing because Logan County is significantly constrained by the maxed-out gas transmission line serving our area.

I have built a great relationship with our one of our natural gas distribution companies serving the area through all of this. We have an understanding on our process when JobsOhio or One Columbus sends out an RFI requesting potential local properties to be submitted for a site selectin process. I forward the RFI to the company noting the natural gas requirements and I ask if our industrial parks are capable of being submitted. The answer most of the time is an expected no. We then file these "no serve"

responses to build our case for needing additional gas capacity. We simply cannot compete for these projects. We are out of buttons to push and levers to pull that make a difference.

But with HB685, we have renewed optimism. Our community would be excited to establish an EnergizeOhio Zone that could support our local gas utility company in building new infrastructure to solve our gas constraints. The gas distribution company has projected the solution for our community to be north of \$50 million and involve extending lines 20+ miles. With a project this size, HB685 could be the necessary piece to push the project into reality. Providing property tax exemptions, accelerated depreciation, state funding options, and an enhanced rate of return all move the needle for us. Without this legislation, we will continue to be a prepared community that loses. This legislation is a key tool in helping solve our gas constraints.

Thank you again for the opportunity lend my support to House Bill 685 this afternoon, and I would welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Vollrath". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "B" and "V".

Ben Vollrath
President
Logan County Chamber of Commerce