

March 22, 2021

Senate Bill 84
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Written Proponent Testimony

Dear Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our perspective and supportive testimony for Senate Bill 84 which directs the excess liquor profits returned to the state from JobsOhio to fund the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund (CORF) program.

My name is Matthew Hammer, and I am the Regional Environmental Manager of LaBella Associates Mayfield Heights Office. LaBella Associates is a nationally recognized design professional corporation with over 1,200 employees and offices in 12 states. We are a full service engineering, architectural, environmental, and planning professional consulting firm which allows us to address any aspect of the built or natural environment.

Through our environmental practice we perform hundreds of environmental site assessments and dozens of brownfield cleanup projects each year. We frequently represent businesses, developers, lenders, and local governments faced with the challenge of trying preparing environmentally impaired brownfield properties for reuse and redevelopment. We work with a number of Ohio communities that are facing the need to have sites ready for development that have cleared the due diligence process, including environmental assessment and cleanup. Often in distress communities it is not possible to marshal the funding needed to address brownfield properties which continues the cycle of disinvestment, declining property tax revenues, job losses, and economic stagnation.

Existing Ohio and US Environmental Protection Agency funding programs for environmental investigation and cleanup do not adequately address the needs of Ohio's most distressed urban communities still struggling after years of job losses and underperforming real estate markets, as well as smaller communities that are unable to effectively compete for funding. Senate Bill 84 will revive the CORF program and once again provide these communities with a greatly needed environmental assessment and remediation funding mechanism to advance brownfield redevelopment.

We understand that the funding strategy under SB 84 does not impact JobsOhio's funding and that funding currently provided by JobsOhio to finance brownfield



remediation for commercial and industrial development projects will not be affected by SB84. LaBella's work has included several recent comprehensive site due diligence projects for large JobsOhio development sites.

Based on our experience in other states, LaBella believes that a restored CORF program along with existing programs like JobsOhio will uniquely position Ohio to out compete other states in the region for economic development projects and business reshoring opportunities by helping to accelerate both shovel ready site preparation and brownfield site cleanup. Across the country states that have established complimentary brownfield programs that target community, municipal, and private sector interests have consistently outperformed others in successful brownfield redevelopment. Coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic, with its significant impact on many already distressed areas, it is particularly important for Ohio communities and businesses to have the tools needed to advance brownfield sites into economically productive, job creating reuses.

In 2019 LaBella offered supporting testimony for Ohio's adoption of the federal bona fide prospective purchaser defense (BFPD), and we commented that it was important to address both legal liability and financial needs in order to re-activate brownfield redevelopment in Ohio. Together with the BFPD legislation Senate Bill 84 does just that, and we offer our full support of this legislation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and look forward to the further passage of SB 84 and increased funding for brownfield properties in Ohio, especially in communities in need of revitalization.

If you have any questions, please contact us via email/phone at mhammer@labellapc.com, 330-414-6666.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hammer, P.G.
Regional Environmental Manager