

Senate Bill 84 – Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund
Written Proponent Testimony
Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
March 23, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. I am Tracy Freeman Director of Government Relations for the Ohio chapter of The Nature Conservancy. I appreciate your time today while I share proponent testimony on Senate Bill 84.

The Nature Conservancy is a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, government, non-profit entities, and local communities to develop pragmatic, market-based solutions to conservation challenges, including water quality, environmental habitat degradation/fragmentation and climate change. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters.

Ohioans should be proud of their actions in 2000 to support the ballot-initiative which led to the Clean Ohio Program. This impressive and far-reaching conservation and revitalization program has provided our citizens and visitors with increased recreation and outdoor opportunities, protected critical natural spaces and habitat, provided miles of safe trails to bicycle and walk, protected our agriculture heritage and precious farmland and, until 2013, cleaned up hundreds of abandoned brownfields in communities all across Ohio. In fact, this program, envied by many other states, has touched down in all 88 counties.

The original design of this program included 4 facets listed below which have provided the listed benefits:

- Green Space Conservation - Preserved more than 175,000 acres of natural areas and countless linear feet of stream
- Farmland Preservation - Protected over 80,000 acres of family farms
- Recreational Trails - Created nearly 500 miles of multi-use, recreational trails
- Brownfields Revitalization - Cleaned up hundreds of abandoned, polluted sites.

It was quite frankly, Clean Ohio's brilliant, all-encompassing, forward-thinking conservation design which resulted in the impressive statistics listed above. Including both a rural and urban component resulted in widespread public support and resounding victory at the ballot for the bond reauthorization in 2008. Since 2013 however, when the CORF portion was removed and repurposed there have not been as many opportunities for communities to benefit from brownfields cleanups. This action disproportionately affected Ohioan's living in urban or industrial areas who often deal with the lingering effects of these abandoned facilities. As noted in other testimony, Ohio was once a national model for brownfield redevelopment; and with your support and the passage of Senate Bill 84 we can again become a leader in these efforts.

The Nature Conservancy was an important proponent and part of the early efforts to develop and secure state-wide adoption of the innovative Clean Ohio program over 2 decades ago. We believe it should provide a multitude of benefits for Ohioans including brownfields redevelopment for communities that may not have other options of state or federal assistance. Healthy, revitalized communities with ample outdoor space, recreational trails and a strong surrounding agricultural industry will keep Ohioan's in our state and, as we seek to attract others to relocate, provide for much in-demand amenities and services.

We applaud Senators Williams and Rulli for recognizing these facts in a nonpartisan manner and ask for the committees support of this bill and swift passage through the General Assembly for Senate Bill 84. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony and please contact me at 614-286-9394 or tracy.freeman@tnc.org with any questions you may have.