



MADISON-PLAINS LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

Senate Bill 52

Opposition Testimony

March 23, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the committee, it is an honor to stand before you today to offer testimony regarding Senate Bill 52. My name is Chad Eisler, and I am the superintendent for the Madison-Plains Local School District. The testimony I offer is in opposition to the bill.

My vision for my school district is that we would become a model of excellence in rural education. Excellence in anything requires investment. In education, part of that investment has to be financial. As a superintendent, I have to be part educator and part businessman. As a businessman, I understand the importance of diversification in revenue streams. Diversification helps to provide strength by not relying solely on one source for what is needed. This is true for just about any organization, but for rural school districts, it is particularly so.

As you likely know, school districts in rural areas have a significant challenge regarding funding and raising revenue. Because of the large amounts of land and square miles that constitute rural school districts, the state views us as being wealthy because of the financial value the land represents. As a result, when it is time to develop the budget for the biennium or look at funding formulas, rural districts often get short-changed because of the value in the land.

Because the value is in the land, farmers are understandably reluctant to pass property taxes, which are the primary way schools are funded in Ohio. They are reluctant because even in down years, they still have to write their property tax check, and for farmers, those checks are very large.

The net result of this is that rural schools often struggle to adequately generate enough funding or revenue to operate their school districts in comparable ways to excellent suburban districts, where there is more opportunity for industrial-based tax revenue streams. Until this opportunity with the solar farms, industrial-based tax revenue streams have been very limited in my district.

Approximately a year-and-a-half ago, we learned that there was potential for two solar farms to be developed within the boundaries of our school district. As we learned about this, we began to learn about the financial impact these two facilities could have on district finances through the additional, diversified

revenue streams they represent. If both of the two proposed solar farms are built to their capacity, our school district stands to receive approximately \$3.9 million dollars annually for the next 20, possibly 40, years. With an annual budget of approximately \$16 million dollars, an injection of \$3.9 million dollars goes a long way towards helping us to stabilize finances, which helps to stabilize operations, which helps to stabilize learning for students within the district. One of the wonderful aspects of these two revenue streams is that they do not cost our district's residents anything. As a result, the tax burden that would normally be asked of the residents would not need to be as high, provided the solar farms are allowed to be developed.

In Ohio, each child has the right to a free and appropriate public education; however, as we all know, education is not free. There is an unwritten social contract, a public trust, that exists to provide this for our children, and each generation is responsible to provide for the education of the generation that follows. We don't pay it back; we pay it forward.

When I leave here today, I am driving back to my school district to attend a levy committee meeting. My district is on the ballot this spring. Excellence requires investment, and excellence is important for the children in my school district. They deserve to have access to an excellent education and opportunities that will help them to prepare for their future. As their superintendent, I, along with all superintendents, have to be thoughtful and wise in how I represent them and consider the greatest good. Striving to protect the district, and enhance it, through the realization of additional, diversified revenue streams is important, and I ask for your support in doing this. Please join me in opposing Senate Bill 52. The children of Ohio's schools deserve it.

Thank you.