



Opponent Testimony for Ohio SB 52 / HB 118
Revise law governing wind farms and solar facilities

Cathy Cowan Becker
Executive Director, Simply Living
In conjunction with the Ohio Sustainable Business Council

Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written opponent testimony on Senate Bill 52 / House Bill 114, which would revise the law governing wind and solar facilities. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am executive director of Simply Living, a community organization that promotes sustainability, environmental awareness, and our local economy. Simply Living works with the Ohio Sustainable Business Council, a statewide coalition of businesses and business networks committed to local, state, and federal policy that supports a vibrant, just, and sustainable economy.

Both Simply Living and the Ohio Sustainable Business Council strongly oppose SB 52 and HB 118. These bills would subject renewable energy projects to a new layer of government regulation beyond the state process, including “township-by-township” referenda that could be called **after** a project goes through months if not years in the state approval process.

SB 52 and HB 118 are not about local control. If they were, they would be applied equally to all energy projects that are currently decided by PUCO – including fracking, gas plants, pipelines, and other fossil fuel infrastructure. Instead, these bills apply only to wind and solar projects.

SB 52 and HB 118 would have the effect of chasing the solar and wind industries out of Ohio. No developer will spend millions of dollars to go through the extensive power siting process if a small township vote could put an end to their project even after it has been approved by the state.

Why on earth would we cripple these industries in Ohio? Clean energy projects are poised to bring billions of dollars in revenue, power millions of homes, and create tens of thousands of jobs in our state. An [Ohio University study](#) found that utility-scale solar alone could bring in \$2.7 billion in tax revenues, power 1.5 million homes, and create almost 55,000 jobs.

The process at the Ohio Power Siting Board is extensive and already includes a great deal of public engagement. Before a developer even applies to OPSB, they must hold an information hearing for people living near the proposed project site to explain the project and the OPSB process. Area residents are encouraged to attend, ask questions, and provide comments.

Throughout the months when the project is pending at OPSB, area residents and others can file written comments, either on the PUCO website or by email. Developers typically send mailers to households and businesses near the proposed project and meet with residents to answer questions and allay concerns. Then there's a public hearing on the project where anyone can testify.

Most notably, the OPSB approval process is adjudicatory. That means if the developer or anyone else makes a claim about the proposed project, they must cite evidence to back up their claims. Developers typically file applications with OPSB that are literally hundreds if not thousands of pages long. The application is similar to a federal Environmental Impact Statement.

People objecting to a proposed project area also held to adjudicatory standards. That means if they make a claim about a utility scale solar or wind project – such as claiming it leaches toxic chemicals, contains radiation, kills wildlife, or lowers property values – they need to provide evidence for these claims. If they cannot, then their claim is not considered, and rightfully so.

We all know that a local election does not work like that. Political candidates can and do lie all the time, and yet people still vote for them. Energy is a complicated subject, and it would be easy for someone who has an axe to grind to flood the field with misinformation to tank a project.

If the Ohio legislature wants to subject solar and wind projects to such an arbitrary process, then it needs to do the same for fracking, pipelines, gas plants, and other fossil fuel infrastructure. It is incredibly bad policy to subject **any** energy project to such an arbitrary process, especially after the state process has concluded. It's even worse to do that to only **some** energy projects.

Simply Living and Ohio Sustainable Business Council support the development of renewable energy in Ohio, both to boost our economy and address the climate crisis. For example, one utility scale solar project proposed near where one of our members lives would:

- Provide 250 MW of carbon-free energy, enough to power 45,000 homes
- Provide \$59 million in payments to landowners
- Create 800 construction jobs
- Generate \$4.4 million in local investment annually

Poll after poll has found widespread support for renewable energy in Ohio. A [March 2018 poll](#) found that 7 in 10 Ohio voters favored a goal of generating 100 percent of the state's electricity using clean and renewable sources like solar and wind by 2030. A [February 2019 poll](#) found that two-thirds of Ohio conservatives believe the state should generate at least half of its energy from renewable sources.. And an [October 2019 poll](#) found that nearly two-thirds of Ohio voters said developing renewable energy is the most important strategy to address Ohio's energy needs.

Simply Living and OSBC stand against creating additional layers of last-minute approvals for project opponents whose arguments failed during the rigorous OPSB process to undermine Ohio's economic development and the clean energy future that a majority of Ohioans support.