**Ohio Senate**
**Energy and Public Utilities Committee**
*Written* **- Opponent Testimony**
**House Bill 201**

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**June 8, 2021**

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as an opponent to House Bill 201. I am Tracy Freeman, Director of Government Relations at The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 201.

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.

House Bill 201 guarantees that every Ohioan has the right to obtain natural gas services by preventing political subdivisions from passing any ordinance, resolution, or building code to limit the use of natural gas. The Nature Conservancy opposes this bill for two reasons: 1) It is unnecessary as Ohioans already can shop for their preferred energy supplier and 2) This committee recently favorably reported legislation that gives political subdivisions the ability to stop renewable power so is clearly choosing winners and losers at the local level. I would like to also stress that The Nature Conservancy does recognize that there will be needs for traditional energy sources to provide secure baseline energy while we as a state, nation, and world transition to lower-carbon power. These existing power sources can be maintained without needing massive financial "recession-proof" bailouts or legislation guaranteeing access and market shares.

The General Assembly continues to consider short-sighted energy bills that move us further away from what Ohioans support and creating a fair playing field for the energy sector in Ohio. Fossil fuels have historically received numerous subsidies from the government and current policies, including this bill which guarantees them a competitive advantage.  At the same time the Senate considers legislation to remove local control over fossil fuels, it is adding local control and new obstacles for renewable energy development. While being promoted as a way to protect people's right to use natural gas, which, as far as we know, is not being demanded or even requested by consumers, HB 201 disregards people's right to have guaranteed access to all other energy sources. Passing state policies that makes it easier for fossil fuels to compete in the energy market while adding new roadblocks to renewable energy development is the epitome of hypocrisy in the Ohio Legislature. The utilities and energy developers should be competing in the energy market - not in the Statehouse. Support for local control and free-

market competition should be consistent principles, not just convenient arguments to cite when supporting a political position.

This bill is a solution looking for a problem as there are no cities in Ohio that have banned the use of natural gas. There are serious environmental and health problems that exist due to the impacts of climate change. Many local leaders in Ohio's cities are trying to address these problems through a variety of sustainability initiatives, including measures to reduce carbon emissions from energy consumption. House Bill 201 will limit the options available to local municipalities at a crucial time when we continue to experience the impacts of climate change, which has led to record-breaking and frightening changes in weather patterns—2019 concluded the hottest decade ever recorded. In addition to stressing natural habitats, higher temperatures harm air quality as emissions from cars, industry and other sources mix with heat and lead to ground-level ozone, which poses serious risks – especially to those with respiratory conditions like asthma. Without question, access to clean air is an environmental determinant of health. By increasing the use of low-carbon energy sources, localities can decrease emissions, improve air quality and health outcomes for their residents and visitors.

Furthermore, House Bill 201 should not be passed because it is yet another piecemeal bill that does not address the need for the state to develop a comprehensive energy policy which has been lacking for several years and led us to on-again, off-again energy policies that hinder economic development and solutions for a healthier Ohio. Developing a true comprehensive energy plan will allow us to harness all the potential we have as a state to be a leader in lower carbon energy sources and respond to current and future demand for a forward-thinking energy portfolio. We have no doubt Ohio's policymakers, businesses and manufacturers, municipalities, environmental and conservation groups, consumer advocacy agencies and all the others that have been a part of the process can come together to craft an approach that will better respond to what polls show the majority of Ohioans want and need. Do not be daunted by the idea of a comprehensive approach. Ohioans have shown they embrace innovation, challenges, and clean energy. We offer our organization's help to the General Assembly to create an inclusive approach that reinforces lower carbon goals, encourages the economic benefits of clean energy, incentivizes new technology to address current challenges related to energy storage, remove impediments to growth, and sends a clear message that Ohio is open for business.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 201. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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