

Chairman Dolan and members of the Senate Finance Committee my name is Amy Grove, and I am a long-time resident of Morgan County and I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of Morgan County and my support of H.B 110.

As a grandparent of students in the Morgan Local School System, a former employee of Ohio State University Extension, an active user of the Kate Love Simpson Library system, and a citizen who appreciates the services of the Morgan County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the volunteer fire departments, the county highway department and the local government entities that maintain the roads and cemeteries, I am most concerned about the tax loss to Morgan County that resulted with the sale of the AEP ReCreation Land to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. The effects of that loss are felt across the county. In a region where resource extraction industries have been the historic norm, resulting in a “boom and bust” economy, this is just another example only with a direct cash loss being extracted. Appalachians are traditionally very resilient, but this is a much steeper hill to climb.

The Morgan Local School system provides free breakfast and lunch to 100% of the students in the school district due to over 51% of its students falling below the poverty line. The lack of dependable internet service throughout the county and aging chrome books provided by the schools were the two things named by students as being problematic, particularly during the 2020 school year. Transportation is one of the largest items in the school budget with MLS buses driving approximately 3500 miles per day. A loss in funding results in less money available for education as buses age and fuel costs increase. Morgan County is fortunate in having a comprehensive high school, but a funding loss compounds the challenge of providing the necessary equipment and instructors for the technical and certificate programs plus the teachers and curriculum needed for the college bound student.

As for the other services, the losses sustained by them will also be felt across the community. The Board of Developmental Disabilities provides services to their clients of all ages. In a county without a support network of other public and private agencies this office and it’s programs are critical. The library system provides the most actively used “hot spot” due to the lack of available and affordable internet service in many areas of the county. Will that go away, not immediately but any cut in hours or staff will limit what services will continue. Volunteer fire and emergency departments and township and village governments managing their cemeteries and roads are also funded through tax levies and, again, the levels of service, the purchases of equipment and the hiring of necessary staff will be affected. OSU Extension and the 4-H Youth Development program reaches more Morgan County youth than any other youth program. It is because of its levy funding that that office has been able grow and offer that plus other quality programs across all Extension areas.

The Jesse Owens State Park/Appalachian Hills Wildlife area is the largest wildlife area in the state. Its long-term economic development potential remains to be seen but the impact of the tax loss to Morgan County is immediate. The citizens of Morgan County want to be good partners with ODNR and its vision for this property but for right now the school and the community services directly impacted need their voices to heard and their quality of life maintained by what is proposed in H. B. 110.

Thank you for your time.