



## **State Representative Bernie Willis**

### **District 74**

#### **Proponent Testimony on House Bill 212 Before the House Committee on Civil Justice**

**April 23, 2024**

Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Matthews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to present proponent testimony on House Bill 212, Ohio's Property Protection Act which I believe is desperately needed legislation.

Foreign persons from adversary nations buying land near our nation's military installations and critical infrastructure is a clear and present danger to our communities and Ohio's military installations and critical infrastructure like refineries, electric power generation and water treatment facilities. The threat specifically from China is not new, but the popular knowledge is. Having spent 32 years in military service, I can tell you now that the US military and intelligence community have been monitoring and countering the efforts of the Chinese Communist Party for 30+ years, knowing that this day would come. And unfortunately the current situation with our national borders is making this threat much worse. Last fiscal year the Customs and Border Patrol reported over 24,000 Chinese nationals apprehended on the border.. a number 34 times greater than the 689 encountered in 2021. In the first 6 months of his fiscal year we have already equaled last year's total and are on pace to increase over 8000% the number of Chinese immigrants who are "encountered" on our borders over the last 3 year period. We can only estimate how many "got away". Currently, 24 states have some law dealing with this and just last year Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, North Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia all passed new laws addressing foreign investment and ownership. It is time for us to act in Ohio also. The USDA reports just under 400,000 acres of agricultural land held by Chinese interests. 2 of those interests hold more than 130,000 acres along the southern border. This should be more than concerning when similar interests are being expressed in northwest Ohio.

Ohio's Property Protection Act is a first and crucial step in safeguarding our critical infrastructure and military installations, to deter and prevent potential attacks. Chairman Hillyer and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critical piece of legislation and I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.