



# Ohio Gas Access Partnership

Close the GAP

Ohio House of Representatives  
c/o Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
77 S High Street  
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: In Person Proponent Testimony – Energize Ohio Bill (HB 349)

April 22, 2024,

Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chair Santucci, Ranking Member Upchurch and Members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on behalf of House Bill 349.

My name is Ben Vollrath and I am the 2024 Chairman for the Ohio Gas Access Partnership, or OGAP. Formed in 2019 by the economic development offices of 3 Central Ohio counties (Madison, Union, and Logan), OGAP is a grassroots 501c3 organization that exists to advocate for building of additional supplies of natural gas to current gas deserts in Ohio, in order to support balanced and sustainable industrial, commercial and residential development. Since 2019, OGAP membership has grown to include many private partners and Ohio counties stretching down to the Ohio River. Each county member has identified a lack of sufficient natural gas capacity to support ongoing economic development. Though our membership sees an abundance of natural gas being produced in the State, it is not currently able to be delivered to many communities that are eager and prepared to grow.

OGAP has long been a champion of the EnergizeOhio concepts laid out in HB349. As a group of local economic developers and elected officials, we see firsthand the importance of having prepared communities. The saying we often use in the Columbus Region is that “prepared communities win.” Winning largely means retaining and attracting jobs that improve the quality of life and the prosperity of an area and its people. Preparation that paves the way for business expansions and new business attraction requires not just finding available land, implementing proper zoning, and fostering a community supportive of growth. Preparation largely hinges on robust infrastructure and having excess utility capacity. Roads, water, sewer, fiber, electric, and natural gas. Not just having them onsite but having excess capacity so new users can come and quickly become operational.

In my home community of Logan County where I serve as lead for countywide economic development, we have done significant amounts of preparation and now have three active industrial parks offering combined over 250 acres of land properly zoned for industrial development. These properties have roads into the park, abundant water and sewer capacity, 100 Gig fiber, and sizeable electric availability. However, the issue now is natural gas capacity.

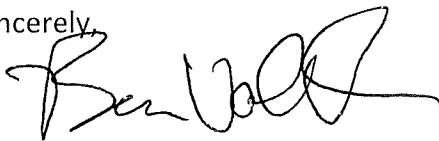
These industrial parks cannot support much more than warehousing because Logan County, like so many Ohio communities, is significantly constrained by the maxed-out gas transmission line serving our area.

I have built a great relationship with one of our natural gas distribution companies serving the area. We have an understanding on the process when JobsOhio or One Columbus sends out a Request-For-Information (RFI) requesting potential local properties to be submitted for a site selection process. I forward the RFI to our gas utility partner and ask if our industrial parks can meet the natural gas requirements. The answer is frequently an expected “no”. We then file these “no serve” responses to build our case for needing additional gas capacity. While other parts of Ohio and surrounding states are winning, Logan County and so many other Ohio communities simply cannot compete for these projects due to natural gas constraints.

But with HB349, Logan County, and gas desert communities around the State can have renewed optimism. OGAP member communities eagerly await the opportunity to establish EnergizeOhio Zones that could support our local gas utility companies in building new infrastructure to solve Ohio gas constraints. Providing accelerated depreciation and assistance with right of way acquisition both move the needle for local communities and the companies that will build the much-needed pipelines. Without passage of this bill, Ohio will continue to have many prepared communities that lose out on economic opportunity. The opportunities won’t all stay in state either. When local communities cannot meet the demands of expanding or new business, they will look elsewhere beyond Ohio’s borders. This amendment is a key tool in helping solve Ohio’s gas constraints.

On behalf of the Ohio Gas Access Partnership and my home community in Logan County, I request that you support passage of HB349. Thank you again for the opportunity lend my support for this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wald". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ben" being more prominent than the last name "Wald".

Chairman, Ohio Gas Access Partnership  
President, Logan County Chamber of Commerce