

# Brown County Land Reutilization Corporation

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## Testimony to the House Finance Committee

Barry Woodruff, Chair

Brown County Land Reutilization Corporation

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing us to submit Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 33. My name is Barry Woodruff, and I am the Chair of the Brown County Land Reutilization Corporation (Land Bank). Our mission is to improve the communities within Brown County through the revitalization, rehabilitation, and demolition of tax delinquent, vacant, and dilapidated properties.

Recognizing the challenges of addressing brownfield sites and the need to have sites ready for redevelopment throughout the State, the FY22-23 main operating budget established the Brownfield Remediation Fund (BRF) and the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization (BDSR), providing \$350 million to assess and cleanup environmentally contaminated sites and \$150 million to address commercial and residential demolition. We applaud the Legislature for these programs, and the Ohio Department of Development in its role in these successful programs.

The Brownfield Remediation Fund's \$350 million provided grants to 313 projects in 83 of Ohio's 88 counties. The Demolition Fund's \$150 million will support 3,699 projects in 87 of Ohio's 88 counties. While this is a significant investment, the need remains for grant dollars to remediate and redevelop these blighted, vacant properties into productive use.

The as-introduced budget does not include funding for the Brownfield Remediation Program or the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program. **I testify today to encourage the committee to provide an additional \$350 million and \$150 million respectively to these programs in the FY24-25 budget.**

The initial investment of \$350 million granted 188 brownfield cleanup grants, which is the final step in the remediation process to address environmental contamination and allow these brownfields to become new industrial and commercial sites, new housing or shovel-ready land. The Brown County Land Bank capitalized on this funding to address brownfields in our community, which contribute to environmental distress and encourage criminal activity, further impeding attempts to revitalize already struggling rural communities. Those brownfields addressed by the Land Bank would continue to wreak havoc on the residents of our local villages, advancing the barriers to revitalization, had it not been for the Brownfield Remediation Fund.

In addition, 125 projects were granted assessment dollars. Assessment work is an important step in the remedial process, but it is only the first step to determine the contamination present on the site and the remedial action required to address such contamination. Without additional funding, these 125 projects

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will likely remain contaminated, and unable to move to a shovel-ready state. The final round for applications through ODOD opened and closed in less than 3 business days due to limited funding remaining and an overwhelming amount of applications. Unfortunately, the Land Bank was unable to explore additional projects due to the shortened timeline and immense need.

Equally as important, the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program's \$150 million investment has allowed for communities to address decades long blight remediation needs. This program has been the first meaningful investment into commercial demolition and this is evident by the 87 counties awarded these funds. This program allowed for an obvious impact in Ohio's communities, but more investment is needed to continue to create opportunities for future development.

The Brown County Land Bank experienced an overwhelming response by County residents and property owners, to the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program. Long blighted properties, which caused significant strain on local communities, have been, and continue to be, revitalized through this meaningful program. As a rural, Appalachian county, we strive to revitalize our communities in a variety of ways, but these efforts are often thwarted, due to the presence of blighted, vacant structures. To say the impact of the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program has been transformative in Brown County, and certainly statewide, would be an understatement.

A \$500 million investment in the brownfield and demolition grant programs will have a positive impact throughout the state, and the communities that are utilizing these funds. Past research by the Greater Ohio Policy Center shows that for every dollar the state invests, there is a five dollar return in private investment. Ohio's previous brownfield grant program contributed more than one billion dollars to the state's GDP during its tenure.

I encourage members of the House Finance Committee to include this in the budget. An investment in brownfield and demolition grant programs is an economic win for the state, and the communities where remediation occurs. This investment is also crucial to rural counties like our own, where general fund is limited and brownfields and blighted, vacant, and abandoned buildings hinder the development of local communities.

Chairman Edwards, Vice-Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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