

House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 33 (Edwards)
Mackenzie Edison, Coordinator, Highland County Land Reutilization Corporation (HCLRC – landbank)

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 33 (HB33), regarding the state’s Main Operating Budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Mackenzie Edison, Coordinator of Highland County Land Reutilization Corporation (HCLRC). I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the HCLRC, a non-profit group, operating as a county landbank incorporated with the Ohio Secretary of State. Our mission is to revitalize and strengthen Highland County’s communities and its rural areas by preserving the current property values through the strategic demolition and remediation of abandoned, blighted, and tax-delinquent properties. Rehabilitating brownfield properties of potentially significant value but that are otherwise non-productive due to abandonment and returning or recirculating these properties back into productive use through a transparent, public, and community-oriented process.

Brownfield Successes Over Past Two Years

Recognizing the challenge presented to Ohio by the presence of brownfields, the FY22-23 main operating budget established the Brownfield Remediation Fund (BRF), providing \$350 million to assess and cleanup these environmentally contaminated sites. We commend the Legislature for the inclusion of this program, and the Ohio Department of Development in its administration of this successful program.

The Brownfield Remediation Fund’s \$350 million provided grants to 313 projects in 83 of Ohio’s 88 counties. While this is a significant investment in the assessment and cleanup of brownfields, the need remains for grant dollars to remediate and redevelop these blighted brownfields into productive use.

Addressing the Ongoing Need for Revitalization

The as-introduced budget does not include funding for the Brownfield Remediation Fund, and therefore, **we are here today to encourage the committee to provide an additional \$350 million to this program in the FY24-25 budget.**

The initial investment of \$350 million granted 188 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, mixed-use space, or developable land. Highland County Land Bank has collaborated with property owners on the UST removal and demolition of a previous building that had been run down and walked away from. Once completed, it will be a large economic development opportunity for our community near our most visited location in our county. We also have had the opportunity to demolish an old mill that will turn into developable land. These projects are a total of **\$524,635.00.**

However, 125 projects were granted assessment dollars, which merely determines the contamination present on the site, but does not provide cleanup dollars to complete the work. Without additional funding, these 125 projects will likely remain contaminated, and unable to move into productive economic engines. Highland County Land Bank was able to use **\$210,273.26** to complete Project Management and VAP/BUSTR Coordination, VAP Phase I Property Assessment, Geophysical Survey, Asbestos Survey, Phase II Property Assessment on our projects.

An additional investment of \$350 million to this program will allow the 125 projects that received an assessment to compete for cleanup dollars. In addition to these 125 projects, the need for brownfield grant dollars remains. 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.

Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) has worked with lawmakers to have a budget amendment drafted to add this funding into the budget. I am here today to encourage members of the House Finance Committee to include this in the budget. An investment in a brownfield grant program is an economic win for the state, and the communities where remediation occurs. Past research by GOPC 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.

Conclusion

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