

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 331. My name is Dave Ashcraft. My testimony hopefully provides some insight into the challenges residents and businesses face working with very small villages.

Many of you may have heard of the Ohio Renaissance Festival. I'm the managing partner. The festival brings together about 200 small businesses and non profit organizations to produce the event. Collectively, the festival employs around 1,000 workers. This main event runs for nine weekends in the fall. We recognize we bring a positive economic impact to the community. We also know traffic on SR73 can be challenging to local communities during operation. We do support our local communities both financially and with resources. Unfortunately, our local government has become our biggest competitor. We have filed to detach from the village and be reclaimed into Massie Township. Our goal is to focus our financial support in Massie Township to help build a fully staffed EMS and fire department service. Local emergency services in rural communities should be the number one service small communities provide.

Why would we file to detach our land and leave the village? HB 331 is attempting to address the core issue – do residents and businesses receive services for the taxes and funding paid? In our case the village provides little to no services for the funding we've paid over the past nearly three decades. New targeted taxes and fees have been passed which further drives a wedge between our small businesses.

The majority of our services are not provided from the Village

- Water is provided by Warren County
- Sewer is provided by Warren County
- SR73 road maintenance is provided by the State and Warren County
- Fire and EMS services are provided by Massie Township
- Health department permits are issued from Warren County
- Water and soil permits are provided by Warren County
- Road and traffic guidance are provided by ODOT

What services are provided by the village?

- The police department is mostly auxiliary (part time and not paid). We pay for the officers to manage traffic during our events. This helps the village maintain some

coverage for residents. However, most of our calls and resident calls are handled through the Sheriff's department since the police department operates parttime.

- The residents receive minimal road maintenance in town.
- 28 hours of mowing a week by the maintenance department in the town
- An outsourced part time building department. A contracted inspector when needed.
- Planning and zoning department.
- Council

Like many villages in Ohio, Harveysburg has been around for a long time and has a small number of residents. There are hundreds of small villages in Ohio that probably have similar stories regarding basic services. In the case of Harveysburg there are about 550 residents. Given the size it's difficult to find volunteers to fill council seats, zoning, planning and BZA positions. Turnaround time for these departments can take months or even years to reach conclusions. The building department does not meet State compliance, yet this issue is ignored causing additional frustration for residents. Given the fact that so few residents are available to participate in committee needs means the town tends to be driven by a few with personal agendas. Checks and balances of villages really don't exist. The residents don't have good access to information, nor do they see any basic services or progress. They end up losing confidence in the council. They've even tried to recall members that were piling on new fees, but that's not really possible to do. Continued erosion of confidence in council leads residents to stop passing levies. The town gets even fewer dollars, so the council seeks funding from other means such as Mayors court, new permits on home maintenance, and targeted taxes on businesses. In the case of Harveyburg the residents have voted down every levy for the past two years and filed a petition to dissolve the Village last November. The Village barely survived the vote. Small villages provide very limited governance or meaningful services. You really end up with an unaffordable HOA.

The story of Harveyburg is probably similar in a lot of places. Small villages simply cannot afford to provide basic services in a timely manner. Services should be objectively measured as HB 331 will do. Residents should be given the option to merge with local townships or counties when budgets can't possibly fund adequate services. Combining fragmented jurisdiction budgets with adjoining jurisdictions will give residents a fighting chance to obtain better services. That's the way I see it.

I know you are early in determining how to measure services in small communities like Harveysburg. Here's a list of recommendations for you to consider:

- Create a simple financial formula to determine the viability of a village. Take annual budgets reported to the State divided by number of residents. If you are under \$500 dollars per resident, you have too little funding to provide basic village services. Volunteer based governments and services is sadly a thing of the past.
- Excluding levies, cap any one entity at max 10% of funding. For example, if one business or mayors court fees are being heavily relied on by the community to exist the village won't survive.
- Set standards on information provided to the residents.
 - o Verify zoning maps and supporting documents are accurate.
 - o Audit the zoning documents and ensure accessibility to the documents.
 - o Verify minutes of meetings are accessible and current.
 - o Verify passed Ordinances can be located and are accessible.
 - o Verify access to local emergency services.

Hopefully, my experience trying to run a business in a small village has provided additional insight into crafting HB331. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.