



House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources
Testimony – Prepared by: Williams County Land Reutilization Corporation (WCLRC-Land Bank)
March 14, 2023

Chair Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party Testimony regarding the state’s Main Operating Budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Kellie Gray, Treasurer and Secretary of Williams County Land Reutilization Corporation (WCLRC). I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the WCLRC, a non-profit group, operating as a county land bank incorporated with the Ohio Secretary of State. Our mission is to revitalize and strengthen Williams 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 returns or recirculates these properties back into productive use through a transparent, public, and community-oriented process.

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.

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

Williams County Land Reutilization Corporation has two brownfield properties that were granted remediation dollars. Without funding, our Court House project and Edon School would have remained a blight on the County.

An additional investment of \$350 million to this program will allow the 125 projects including ours 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 three business days due to limited funding remaining and an overwhelming number of applications. Knowing how blighted properties in a neighborhood can impact the value of other properties and can result in a downward spiral of disrepair, foreclosure, and vacancy in a neighborhood, and thinking there would be additional funding made available in 2024, WCLRC is currently working on an assessment of brownfield through Ohio EPA Targeted Brownfield Assessment program. Without the additional cleanup money, the project will end up at a stand-still.

I am writing 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 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.

Chair Jones, Ranking Member Troy, 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.

Sincerely,

Kellie J. Gray