

Brown County Land Reutilization Corporation

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Testimony to the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources

Barry Woodruff, Chair

Brown County Land Reutilization Corporation

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Introduction

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 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.

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, **I testify 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. 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.

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However, statewide, 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. 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. Unfortunately, the Brown County Land Bank was unable to explore additional projects due to the shortened timeline and immense need.

Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) has worked with lawmakers to have a budget amendment drafted to add this funding into the budget. I 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. This investment is also crucial to rural counties like our own, where general funding is limited and brownfields hinder the development of local communities.

Conclusion

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 pleased to answer any questions you may have.