

House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources
Testimony – Prepared by: David Kern Defiance County Commissioner/Landbank President
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 David Kern, Chairman of the Defiance County Board of Commissioners and President of the Defiance Land Reutilization Corporation (DCLRC). I am submitting written testimony to support the residents and business owners of Defiance County and the DCLRC. As a Commissioner, I am tasked to oversee county activities and work to ensure citizen concerns are met. I recognize and support the work of the Defiance County Land Reutilization Corporation, and know the work being done positively effects our county. 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. I 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, **I am writing to encourage the committee to provide an additional \$350 million to this program in the FY24-25 budget.**

Defiance County Land Reutilization Corporation has brownfield properties on the list of 125 projects that were granted assessment dollars. Without additional funding, our Zeller project will likely remain contaminated. Adding to the concern, while working on these assessment projects, DCLRC identified more brownfields in Defiance County that need assessment and cleanup dollars. Please assist us in the vital role of promoting revitalization, renewal, and community pride.

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, DCLRC has been actively working on additional projects in preparation for 2024 funding.

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.

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