



State Senator **PAULA HICKS-HUDSON**

Assistant Minority Whip

11th District

Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Senate Bill 111– Sponsor Testimony May 16, 2023

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 111. This legislation will reform some of Ohio’s agriculture laws to eliminate or ease barriers for farmers in urban settings.

Urban agriculture refers to the practice of growing and cultivating crops and raising animals within urban areas, such as cities or suburbs. This can include anything from classic community gardens all the way up to small-scale commercial farms. Supporting urban agriculture offers several benefits, such as promoting environmental sustainability, community building, and increasing access to fresh and healthy food. Moreover, it supports food security by providing local communities with fresh produce and reducing the reliance on long-distance transportation of food, while also offering a platform for education and job training where individuals can learn about sustainable agriculture practices and earn income from selling their products.

This bill aims to position Ohio at the forefront of the country’s emerging urban agriculture movement. Given our state’s rich agrarian history, we see this as the next frontier for our state to conquer.

The most significant portion of this bill is the reintroduction of House Bill 592 from the 134th General Assembly, which sought to establish the Urban Farmer Youth Initiative pilot program and make an appropriation to fund the initiative. The goal of the program is to allow and encourage urban youth to learn about growing their own food, while teaching young, aspiring farmers about the connection between the foods they produce and how it can support a healthy life.

The initiative aims to educate urban youth aged 6 to 18 about urban farming, with a \$500,000 appropriation distributed over two years. The Central State and Ohio State Extension Offices will utilize these funds to provide programming and support for urban youth, as well as coordinate with existing farming education initiatives.

In addition to this reintroduction, the bill will make two minor amendments to Ohio’s building and tax codes as they relate to agriculture. First, the bill will provide a uniform method of regulating temporary greenhouses, such as hoop houses, by providing a clear definition for the structures and extending Ohio’s agricultural use exemption to include them. Currently, buildings used primarily for agricultural purposes, like barns and sheds, are exempt from complying with the same building codes and regulations as commercial or residential structures.



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However, a lack of consensus across municipalities in Ohio over how to classify temporary greenhouses and hoop houses has led to a patchwork of inconsistently enforced laws and regulations that are difficult for urban farmers to navigate. By establishing a more concrete definition and regulation method for these structures, our bill will alleviate this issue and create a level playing field for agricultural producers.

Additionally, this bill will clarify language in the Ohio Revised Code regarding Ohio's Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) program. The CAUV program provides property tax relief to farmers by valuing farmland based on its current agricultural use rather than its potential for development, with the intention of encouraging agricultural production and land preservation.

To qualify for the program, land must meet one of two requirements during the three years preceding an application for the CAUV: Ten or more acres must be devoted exclusively to commercial agricultural use or the farm must produce an average yearly gross income of at least \$2,500. However, while it is mentioned in the CAUV application instructions that land does not need to be contiguous to satisfy the acreage requirement so long as the plots are under the same ownership within the same county, the Revised Code makes no mention of this matter, which this bill would change.

Put simply, this bill is the product of collaboration with urban producers, local governments, agriculture groups, and other stakeholders, and will support both current and future urban producers in Ohio. With that, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.