

Sonia Flunder-McNair
SONIA Organics Products, LLC
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Honorable Members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Senator Tim Schaffer, Chair
Re: SB 111, Urban Farmer Youth Initiative Pilot Program

Dear Members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,
I'm here representing the many youth that I have mentored and nurtured throughout the years. Who now proudly chant, WE ARE YOUR URBAN YOUTH FARMERS!

Youth are increasingly detached from nature and their food sources. And, they are even more attached to cell phone screens and unhealthy lifestyles. Violence, guns and drugs has been planted in our schools and neighborhoods leaving everyone scrambling for ways to create peace and innovate ideas to save our youths.

The past few years I've witnessed what is considered one of the "worst" areas in Toledo, Ohio to become a trusted, safe space in my beautiful Junction neighborhood. An urban farm educational wholistic green space for youth and their families was created in 2018 ...

I wasn't born into land ownership or handed down a farming legacy. I started by acting on the needs of my community. I leased land from our local land bank just to see if I can turn what was considered a Baltic Ave into a Park Place. A space that would be respected and loved by all. I remember telling myself that it doesn't matter if I was born and raised in this neighborhood. You just can't go in and do whatever you want without having the blessing of community. This is how I was introduced to Ms Gloria and the late Ms. Hoskins. I shared with them my vision for the corner of Woodland and City Park Ave, and shared with me some of the oral history of our community. This helped my vision in developing what is now not only a wholistic community green space but has expanded to be a USDA urban farm.

Farming requires a lot of immediate capital. There are food producers who rely on outside funding and would like to begin by using a similar model like Tatum Park to build not just a wholistic green space but also an urban arm with an educational component to teach sustainable agriculture.

People who work in agriculture are built tough, some of the hardest-working people around. Invest in these people.

Changing weather patterns like lack of rain can take new and existing farms out of business before they begin without the help of Ohio and SB111. This bill will inspire future generations to follow their farming dreams. Training programs are expensive to operate. Programs like SONIA Organics farm to product program generate its own

revenue however we still rely on outside funding to assist in supplementing the program.

The land that I work, the land that I grow local food, the land where I teach the next generation of youth farmers addresses and meditates so many social determinants of health that has been recognized by our community much more than we expected.

City of Toledo has recognized that this beautiful green space interrupts violence with less emergency calls to 911, fire and rescue.

I personally feel that the time is NOW to push urban farming and its farmers to elevate local economics. By passing Ohio's Senate Bill 111 the Ohio Senate is showing not only support the future of urban farming for the state of Ohio and the positive outcomes produced in our cities through the cultivation of our next generation of urban farmers.

will be a win for us all. This well thought out bill will help to create job opportunities and push the local economy. Creating local food systems, like local water systems, will leave us all better off as a whole.

Thank you

Sonia Flunder-McNair