

Dr. Terry Johnson
State Senator
14th District



Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 72
Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
March 7, 2023

Chairman Reineke, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Safety Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 72.

This legislation would require public utilities to provide security systems for substations to protect against vandalism and other threats.

An electric substation is part of an electrical generation, transmission, and distribution system that transforms the voltage of electricity to perform properly. Substations and solar fields that feed into the electric grid are vulnerable to attacks because of the fragile electrical system. With many substations being in remote locations, it becomes difficult for security or law enforcement to reach the substation quickly in the time of an attack.

Such attacks could be acts of vandalism or intentional acts of terrorism. According to the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, & Emergency Response, there were 105 instances of vandalism and actual physical attacks, and 57 reports of suspicious activity around electric substations in 2022 alone.¹ Recently, in Pierce County, Washington—the second most populous county in the state—a substation was attacked and equipment was vandalized in four substations.² This attack caused a fire resulting in approximately 14,000 customers affected

¹ [Electric Disturbance Events \(OE-417\) Annual Summaries \(Energy.gov\)](#)

² [Western District of Washington | Two charged with attacks on four Pierce County power substations | United States Department of Justice](#)

and estimated damage of over \$3 million for just one of the affected substations.

I applaud the work done by my colleague Senator Frank Hoagland in the 133rd General Assembly through Senate Bill 33. That bill, which became law in April of 2021, increased the penalties for those who willfully cause damage to a critical infrastructure facility. While this is a great step in the right direction, we recognize that more needs to be done on the prevention end of the spectrum when it comes to this issue.

As we see across the country, such attacks on substations and solar fields could cause detrimental power outages, particularly for rural communities. A substation losing the ability to generate power could have secondary and tertiary effects on the community it services. Such effects could be vulnerable populations left without air conditioners or fans on a hot summer day, causing heat injuries—some of which could be deadly. Alternatively, losing power during a frigid winter storm, something Ohio is all too familiar with, could leave vulnerable populations without any source of heat. Further, many individuals have critical, expensive medications that require refrigeration, such as insulin, which could be destroyed if left unrefrigerated for a long period of time. Another possible outcome is that any medical devices that require a power source could also fail, resulting in severe health risks for many.

We have come to rely on electricity to meet our basic human needs. To leave these substations without security could cause detrimental or even deadly consequences. This is truly a public safety issue. We need to take preventative measures to ensure that our power supply remains protected and secure to those seeking to threaten the wellbeing of our families, neighbors, and communities. Thank you again for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.