

Senate Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony, Sub. House Bill 33 (Edwards)
Written Only
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Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present interested party testimony on Substitute House Bill 33 (HB33).

My name is Mollie Fitzgerald and I am the Executive Director of the Athens County Economic Development Council and Athens County Port Authority. Both entities work closely with local, regional, and state partners to facilitate economic development in the county through business retention projects, entrepreneurship and attraction efforts, and site development.

Brownfield Revitalization & Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Programs

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 creation of this program, and thank the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) for its successful administration of this program over the past two years.**

The BRF'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.

At the same time, the legislature made a significant investment in Ohio's Land Banks with a \$150 million investment in the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program (Demo). This program is helping local communities demolish nearly 3,700 dilapidated commercial and residential buildings in 87 of Ohio's 88 counties. Communities across Ohio are eliminating these blighted and abandoned structures, creating new opportunities for economic and residential development and revitalizing neighborhoods.

Taken together, these programs are making a transformational impact across the entire state.

Addressing the Ongoing Need for Revitalization

While we were disappointed that the as-introduced budget zeroed out funding for the BRF and Demo programs, we are immensely grateful to your colleagues in the Ohio House of Representatives who restored funding to these two programs at the same levels as in the 2021 budget - \$350 million to the BRF, \$150 million to Demo – over the next two years.

The initial investment of \$350 million in the BRF 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, recreational, or developable land. The additional investment ensures that the 125 projects which previously received assessment grants can proceed with applications for clean-up funds, while also permitting those projects which were shut-out of the first phase of grants the opportunity to compete for clean-up and assessment dollars.

Likewise, the \$150 million initial investment in the Demo program has resulted in the demolition of nearly 3,700 dilapidated commercial and residential buildings in 87 of Ohio's 88 counties. Communities across Ohio are eliminating these blighted and abandoned structures, creating new opportunities for economic and residential development and revitalizing neighborhoods. The additional investment guarantees that this important work can continue.

We already have a pipeline of sites and buildings that would benefit from this funding including remediation for the Mt. Zion Preservation Society building, which will serve as a center for black history and culture in our community; further assessment of coal mine land for economic and recreation redevelopment projects, and the cleanup of a former car repair garage that sits along a primary corridor into our city that is experiencing new investment with the opening of a new Emergency Department.

We would greatly appreciate the Senate's support for the renewed funding for the BRF and Demo programs in HB33.

Conclusion

Chair Dolan, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding House Bill 33.