



Hamilton County, OH

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Chairperson O'Brien, Vice Chair Gaverone, and members of the Senate Local Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB315, introduced by Representative Seitz and Hall. My name is Tom Weidman and I am Chairman of the Sycamore Township Board of Trustees and also the President of the Hamilton County Township Association.

Sycamore Township is a Limited Home Rule Township and has utilized nearly every economic development tool available to us by the Legislature including Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Joint Economic Development Zones and Districts (JEDZ/JEDD), and Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA), to name a few. Those tools have led to a strong, healthy and vibrant community that maintains one of the lowest real property taxes in the State. In fact, Sycamore Township has the lowest township property taxes of any township in Hamilton County and is the only township in the county that has not had a new real property tax levy on the ballot in over 18 years. The Township's mix of retail and office in the Kenwood Business District which includes the Kenwood Towne Center Mall draws people from all over the Midwest to Hamilton County and we have been able to capitalize on that to the tune of over \$1 Billion per year in retail sales – which is the largest concentration of sales tax revenue for Hamilton County. However, the recent downturn in retail and office in a post COVID world has shown us that the current tools are no longer sufficient to continue to thrive without additional revenue.

Sycamore Township has been an outstanding partner with the Ohio Department of Transportation and Hamilton County in providing services and funding to many road projects in the Township. Since 2000, Sycamore Township has contributed millions of dollars to infrastructure development not owned by the Township.

I am here today to address the piece of the original HB315 bill pertaining to New Community Authorities, that was removed before being sent to the Senate. It is important to note that NCAs were approved by the Legislature on June 30, 2023 in the State of Ohio Operating Budget for all Townships with a population exceeding 5,000 in counties with a population between 200,000 and 400,000 residents. That legislation afforded many Townships in Ohio to establish NCA's, but exempted 12 Home Rule Townships in Ohio, solely because they are in counties that exceed 400,000 in population. Ironically, these same 12 exempted Townships are the more advanced Townships already utilizing many of the other economic development tools provided to Townships by the Legislature.

The original version of HB315 included among other things, the ability for the 12 Limited Home Rule Townships that were exempted in the previous Legislation of 2023, to create New Community Authorities. Unfortunately, the NCA portion of the bill was removed before the bill was reported out of the House State and Local Government Committee, which we believe was a mistake.

An NCA does not deprive nor re-direct County revenue which is a common fear. Instead, it helps create new revenue opportunities that benefit all levels of local government, including counties. NCAs are a true public - private partnership where the stakeholders in the community have a standing in the execution and governance of the district.

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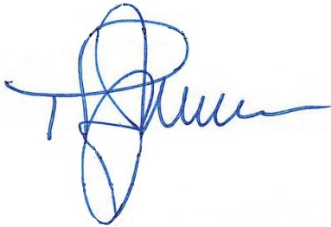
Chairperson O'Brien, Vice Chair Gaverone, and members of the Senate Local Government Committee

In the near future, we are going to be faced in Sycamore Township with the challenge of significant infrastructure improvements to improve traffic safety on State and County roads in our Kenwood Business District. These improvements are estimated to exceed \$8 million. Both the State and the County do not have these funds available for the improvements. We also have the need to increase our police presence at the Kenwood Towne Center, which is the only significant mall remaining in Southern Ohio. It is important that we keep our visitors safe at the Kenwood Towne Center. It is our hope that we can generate the necessary funds to provide both infrastructure improvements and added safety through an NCA.

Finally, we would urge you to restore the section of HB315 that permits the 12 exempted Home Rule Urban Townships the ability to create New Community Authorities for the furtherance of economic development and community safety. This provision will provide Sycamore Township and the other 11 Townships with the ability to continue to innovate and find ways to grow and prosper so that we may continue to provide outstanding services to our residents and business community, and a safe environment for the hundreds of thousands of visitors that we welcome to the Kenwood Towne Center each year.

I thank you for your time today and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Weidman', with a stylized, circular flourish at the end.

Tom Weidman