



Senator Roegner, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Force Accounts
Representative Johnson, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Force Accounts
Joint Committee on Force Accounts

Date: May 12, 2021

We, the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, the County Engineers Association of Ohio, the Ohio Township Association and the Ohio Municipal League, collectively support the request for increasing the Force Account Limits for local entities.

As the committee has heard, force account limits have not been raised since 2003 and no longer reflect the cost of road work today. The committee has also heard several arguments against increasing force account limits that our associations feel compelled to address.

Inflation

Inflation has eroded the ability of local governments to build in 2021 - with their own forces - what they could in 2003. The private sector has been able to adjust their costs to reflect inflationary changes throughout this same time period. The private contractors are not expected to hold their prices from 2003, and neither should the public sector be expected to do so. The only organizations opposed to adjusting the force account limits to account for inflation over the past 18 years are the same organizations that stand to benefit from suppressing, reducing or eliminating force account work.

Records from national highway organizations and from agencies around Ohio show that inflation has doubled nationally for highway construction costs since 2003 and in Ohio those actual costs have more than doubled. The facts support this increase. It is simply not possible for construction rates to have doubled nationally but to have only increased by 58 percent in Ohio, as claimed by the opponents of changes to the limits. The historic numbers presented by county engineers and township trustees comparing 2003 to 2020 show that Ohio is actually above the national inflation rate. Recognizing accurate inflation history in this situation is only fair and proper. We are not asking to take away from the private sector's work by having limits higher than inflation; we are simply asking for a reinstatement of our ability to build what we were authorized to in 2003. This means recognizing and incorporating those inflationary numbers into the limits since they were last adjusted in 2003. Dollars saved in using the local work forces for these smaller projects can then be used to match OPWC and other funding programs to help get larger projects out to bid.

Quality of Work and Quality of Workers

While some industry representatives have stated that government employees are not qualified and are less trained than industry employees, we respectfully disagree. Public sector employees receive similar training to their private sector counterparts. Further, many private sector

workers are hired by local governments. Rather than losing industry knowledge after leaving the private sector, these workers actually become cross-trained in additional areas, ultimately making them more valuable public employees.

When we are building and maintaining our transportation system, quality and safety have to be maintained, whether the public is driving over a small bridge or a multi-million dollar roadway or structure. This includes providing a trained workforce.

Expansion of Government

The committee has heard that local government would expand and hire more workers if the force account limits were adjusted. These claims were also made in 2003 but never materialized. Facts show that almost every county engineer's office has fewer highway workers than in 2003. Rather than growing government, this is good government – managing tasks and projects that are small enough to be done quickly, efficiently, and with quality workmanship. This is serving the public and their tax dollars wisely.

Service to the Public

Local governments are mandated by the Ohio Revised Code to maintain roads for the safety and convenience of the traveling public. The dedicated public officials in these local governments have an obligation to spend taxpayer money wisely. Bidding out projects does not always save money, time, or resources – in fact, sometimes it produces the opposite effect. Today, local government officials can bid out all projects if they so choose. The force account limits were put in place to allow local governments some flexibility to do their own road work, but to still avoid substantial competition with private businesses. Higher costs in 2003 dictated an increase after 30 years for counties, 14 years for municipalities, and nine years for townships, respectively. Now, 18 years later, higher costs dictate another increase to allow local governments to continue to do some of their own road work and utilize their taxpayers' money efficiently and effectively.

Please support local governments' need to keep up with inflation and allow the road and bridge projects that were possible in 2003 to be possible today, with their own workforces. This would recognize the inflationary doubling of costs over the past 18 years. We're asking for the flexibility for local governments to choose to use their own work force labor or contract labor for small projects, utilizing tax dollars wisely. Contractors will continue to build the medium, large, and extra-large projects.

Thank you for your consideration.

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