



825 US 42 NE
LONDON, OHIO 43140
T: 740-852-9404 | F: 740-852-9530

April 29, 2021

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Force Accounts:

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Bryan Dhume, and I am currently serving my 6th year as the elected Madison County Engineer. I am here in support of increased force account limits for county engineers. It is my belief that we have more in common than not, and that there is a constructive path forward on this issue that would benefit the residents of Ohio.

As Madison County Engineer, I manage an annual budget of \$6 million, and maintain a network of 342 miles of county roads, 189 bridges, and 200 miles of ditches on county ditch maintenance. We have a population of 44,000 people. Our regular road and bridge funding consists entirely of gas tax and license plate fees. We receive no county general fund, property tax, or sales tax revenue.

I have a 25-year professional background in this industry that includes work in other county engineer's offices, a private consulting firm, and even a heavy civil construction company. I've worked on roads, bridges, and drainage systems my entire career. I've also worked on locks and dams, oil refineries, and river barge loading facilities. The background of my staff is equally extensive. All of my deputy engineers have significant experience in private industry; my Chief Deputy owned his own construction company for 23 years, building bridges, schools, and land development projects. My highway workers also have a varied mix of industry experience; my team comes from construction companies, trucking companies, factories, and other public agencies. They like working for the Madison County Engineer because of the stability of the job, the variety of year-round work we do, the ability to sleep in their own bed at night, the competitive pay and benefits we offer, and the opportunity to serve their community. They are a trained, competent team that takes great pride in their work.

I am statutorily obligated to maintain a network of roads and bridges, and I take very seriously the stewardship of our public tax dollars. My philosophy has been to perform our work in-house, both operations and engineering when prudent to reduce costs. I want to take full advantage of our experience and expertise first. We then contract work out as operational efficiency dictates, or as required by law. There is work that we are better off contracting out, whether it be due to competency or schedule constraints, and we routinely contract over \$1 million in projects annually. We have a core group of local contractors we work with, and our larger federal aid road and bridge projects regularly attracts contractors throughout the central Ohio region.

I am dealing with a significant backlog of road and bridge work that needs done in my county. We have 39 bridges rated a 4 or less that are in poor condition. These all need

replaced in the next 4 years. Most of these are bridges that can be built efficiently with our crews, and we are constantly taking steps to reduce our costs and improve our speed. We've started casting our own concrete beams, which we produce in our indoor facility in the winter months. This saves fabrication and transport costs of \$20,000 per bridge, and makes us more productive in the winter when not plowing snow. We started driving our bridge piling, which saves us \$10,000-\$15,000 in mobilization costs per bridge, because we can move our own crane and pile driver in county for a few hundred.

Over half of our 342 road miles are less than 20' in width, and we need to widen these roads to standard for safety reasons. To contract this work out would cost in the neighborhood of \$150,000-\$200,000 per mile. We are working on a process to complete the work in-house that will cost us a fraction of that, again because we can mobilize our own cold planning equipment in county at minimal cost.

On both of these examples above, we are up against a wall on the current force account limits, and our hands are getting increasingly tied. In the examples above, if I can't build the project by force account, it's likely not getting done. The bridges that we can build and amount of road we can improve are less than in 2003, when these limits were last increased. Labor, fuel, and materials have all gone up, with the National Highway Construction Cost Index showing 96% overall in that time. My own material costs have increased significantly just in the last year, with my last order of steel bridge piling being 35% higher than the same order a year prior.

Please, give me the authority I need to use my tax dollars as efficiently as I can, making the most use of the work force I already have and the equipment I already own, by either increasing these limits or abolishing them altogether. Artificial limits do not increase the amount of work I build by contract, they only serve to reduce the total amount of work I can complete. Let the schedule and the money dictate which method is more effective, not an artificial limit. I would ask you – if you were in my shoes, how would you do it?

Thank you for your public service, your service on this committee, and for your time and attention to this important matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bryan D. Dhume, PE, PS
Madison County Engineer