

**88th House District**  
Seneca and Sandusky Counties

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Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Community Revitalization Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 222.

For a moment, imagine what it would be like if Ohio had to seek the approval of Michigan and Wisconsin to repair and make decisions that affect Cincinnati, like fixing the Brent Spence Bridge. Seneca County does not have to imagine what that is like, because they depend on Sandusky and Ottawa Counties to deal with the “Sunny Farms Landfill” in rural Fostoria. This landfill takes in more trash annually than any landfill in Ohio (2.2 million tons) and they want more. This is even more striking when we realize that 98% of this waste comes from out of state.

Seneca County is forced to be a part of the Ottawa, Sandusky, Seneca Solid Waste District (OSS). Unlike our mental health districts which are voluntary alliances, our solid waste districts are held together by compulsion. A county cannot withdraw without the permission of the other counties. Even a majority vote cannot release them. Just one county can hold two others hostage to the district.

In most circumstances, communities might not even notice the inequality in this type of arrangement. In fact, the average citizen might not even know the mechanics of how a solid waste district works. But when an out-of-state organization is located in your backyard, importing garbage from the east coast, that causes a health nuisance in your community, people start to pay attention and the citizens of Seneca County have taken notice.

The Seneca County commissioners and the Seneca County Health District are expressing concern that the oversight of a large landfill, which is owned and operated by out-of-state entities that import trash from other states, is being hindered by a lack of cooperation from the OSS Solid Waste District. It is routine for attempts by Seneca to monitor or regulate this landfill to be met with resistance and lawsuits from the landfill. This is both a delay tactic and a means of exasperating funds from the district. The Seneca County Commissioners and the Health Commission complain that they are not able to be nimble in their responses due to the bureaucratic delays from the Ottawa and Sandusky County Commissioners on the OSS board. These commissioners deny the delays, and fault Seneca for not following “proper procedures.”

Meanwhile, the landfill continues operating on a “consent order.” This means that they failed to meet certain EPA requirements. To continue operating, exceptions were made that permitted them to keep their doors open. This allows them to state that they are in “compliance,” although it is only because exceptions have been made.

When the challenges grow too significant, the landfill changes ownership and lays blame on previous owners and promises to do better. In some cases, improvements have been made but not to the satisfaction of the community.

In the midst of this chaos, the landfill continues to expand and grow. Understandably, the Seneca community feels helpless to stop it. The community understands that the landfill will never go away. However, the citizens are demanding appropriate oversight and vehemently resist the expansion of the landfill.

Ironically, Fostoria, Ohio is home to three counties but not the three counties that have jurisdiction over the landfill. Hancock and Wood Counties are left without a voice while Ottawa and Sandusky have veto power over Seneca. Unelected officials located nearly an hour away, are able to dictate to those elected by their constituents what the policy should be.

The remedy is very simple. I have borrowed and adapted a phrase from our founding fathers: **No Trashification without Representation**. It is unjust for the people of Fostoria to have decisions made by unelected politicians two counties away from them. They elected the commissioners in Seneca but not in Sandusky or Ottawa.

I have attended multiple public meetings in packed-out rooms with five hundred folks or more frustrated with the impact of the landfill in their community. Senator Reineke is always there. The Seneca County Commissioners are there. The Health Commissioner is there. The local mayors and township trustees are present. Who was not present? The unelected members of the solid waste district.

House Bill 222 allows a solid waste district to align with the voter's will by making these alliances voluntary rather than mandatory. This follows the model already in existence with the mental health boards. If a county chooses to separate and realign, they simply must make a formal declaration that they are withdrawing from the district. They must then create a memorandum of understanding with the counties from which they are separating. If the various counties are not able to come to a mutual understanding, then the separation will be adjudicated by a common pleas court in a county contiguous to the district.

The ask is very simple. Allow the citizens to choose whom they would like to represent them in this vital community issue. Let the ballot box mean something. Please join me in restoring the voice of the people by passing H.B. 222.

I now invite my Co-Sponsor, Ty Mathews to share his comments and then I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.