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**Ohio House of Representatives
Energy Committee
Proponent Testimony
Ohio House Bill 15**

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Good morning, Chair Holmes, Vice Chair Klopfenstein, Ranking Member Glassburn and members of the House Energy Committee, I am Rebecca Mellino, Policy Associate for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony as a proponent of House Bill 15.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization with chapters in all 50 states and projects in over 70 countries. We are a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, governments, and local communities to develop pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, including land conservation, water quality, and climate change. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters, and we own and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state.

Ohio is at a pivotal time in its energy future, and we thank Representative Klopfenstein and the members of this committee for making energy a priority in this General Assembly. TNC supports much of HB 15 and encourages consideration of additional opportunities to support energy in Ohio. TNC applauds the sponsor for including the immediate repeal of OVEC subsidies in the Legacy Generation Resource Recovery Repeal that artificially inflates the energy market. Instead of letting the market support cost effective energy generation, Ohioans have been paying for these coal plants which harm the air quality of our communities.

We also encourage you to consider addressing energy reliability and affordability through energy efficiency programs and to create additional opportunities for new energy projects to be sited in Ohio.

Energy Siting Opportunities

Renewable energy is an important piece of the energy landscape if Ohio will meet its surging demand for energy. While it is a key piece in a mix of energy sources for our future, the adoption of utility-scale renewable energy in Ohio lags far behind neighboring states like Indiana. Many Ohio businesses seek renewable energy and because of a lack of generation here, spend their energy dollars in other states. Moreover, in a time when Ohio needs energy generation to increase rapidly, renewable energy can be built and start producing for the grid more quickly than other types of generation. However, SB 52 of the 134th General Assembly has significantly limited the opportunity for new renewable energy development in the state. Three and a half years after its passage, over 25% of Ohio Counties have significantly restricted the opportunity for large scale renewable projects in their counties, even restricting the ability of landowners to allow development on their private property. At a time when there is a significant need and growing demand for new generation, new policies are needed to bridge the gap created by SB 52.

TNC supports the Priority Investment Area language that is in this version of HB15 and sees great opportunity for renewable development on brownfields and former coal mines in Ohio. With a quarter of counties having already excluded renewables, it is critical that Priority Investment Areas are available to counties that have passed SB 52 exclusion zones. All counties should be able to continue protecting their farmland and green spaces from development but open their brownfields to renewables.

To increase community input and benefit, TNC has drafted a proposal, modeled on legislation enacted in Indiana, that would provide an additional option to the SB 52 exclusions. Our proposal encourages County Boards of Commissioners to complete comprehensive land use planning and define for their county which areas could be open for renewable development. In the proposal, the county plans would include benefits requirements that would meet their communities' needs. Proposed projects that are found to meet those criteria would then simultaneously meet the Power Siting Board's public interest, necessity, and convenience criteria, providing an incentive for developers to bring desired projects to those specified areas in a county. It is important for communities to have a voice in what happens in their neighborhoods. We believe adding County Energy Land Use Plans to counties' available options will help them take control of both the negative and positive aspects that can come from energy development and we urge you to consider our proposal to address this concern.

Community Energy

The Nature Conservancy supports the development of community energy facilities because it is an important tool for Ohio to add energy generation capacity and improve the reliability of its energy for all customers. Many energy customers have goals that they want to meet but may not be able to because they rent, or up-front costs are too expensive. Community energy facilities are an opportunity for those customers to build their desired energy source at another location but still meet their goals. Having energy generated in the state of Ohio is more efficient

because the energy does not have to travel as far to get to its customer. Community energy facilities would also add reliability of energy and benefit all customers, even those not paying to build additional generation. At a time when we know demand for energy is increasing, community energy facilities would create an opportunity to add much needed capacity.

Energy Efficiency

When looking at the energy system as a whole, increased energy efficiency would lower energy bills for consumers while improving the reliability of energy for all Ohioans. Energy efficiency is a valuable tool; energy that never gets used is the cheapest energy Ohioans have. Energy efficiency programs offered by utilities can be designed with their specific customer needs in mind and utilize smart meter technology during high stress events through demand-side management (DSM) events.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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