

House Energy Committee
Proponent Testimony: House Bill 303 Community Energy

Rebecca Mellino, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
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Good afternoon Chair Holmes, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Rader, and members of the House Energy Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony as a proponent of House Bill 303.

As a conservation organization protecting natural areas and habitats around the world, The Nature Conservancy also has a strong interest in renewable energy development. Climate change is impacting critical habitats and natural areas and transitioning to a lower-carbon future will benefit not just Ohioans, but our planet. Renewable energy development also provides jobs, tax revenues, private landowner financial stability and community energy security. The Nature Conservancy supports the development of renewable energy in communities that want it, and we do support community involvement in all energy source siting.

House Bill 303 includes the opportunity for community energy projects built on a brownfield, commercial rooftop, or other distressed site to be twice as large as any other community energy project. Encouraging development of degraded lands for energy production is a win to protect natural areas, and for our grid. TNC has identified formerly mined and degraded lands that can be repurposed to better serve us as sources of energy. For example, Ohio has over 14,000 acres of brownfields over 64 sites, as well as over 300,000 acres of mine land that is within a suitability buffer for solar development. This land is currently not productive, often an eyesore and a potential liability for the local community and/or the state of Ohio. Opportunities to develop larger energy projects on brownfields as contained in HB 303 would bring economic development, jobs, and return productivity to these otherwise blighted sites.

This community energy bill will provide an opportunity for Ohioans to pool their resources with neighbors to have energy they prefer to be built closer to their homes. Communities may prefer to buy solar energy but are unable to access solar because their roof is shaded, they rent their home, or they can't afford the upfront cost on their own. By coming together with their neighbors, solar energy becomes more affordable and accessible to Ohioans who might otherwise not be able to afford it. Neighbors who do not choose to participate in a community

energy program also benefit from their neighbors having done so as having more, diversified, distributed energy makes a stronger grid for all.

By distributing smaller community energy projects throughout the state of Ohio, energy does not have to travel as far to reach its customers. This not only makes energy more efficient because it has to use fewer lines to get to customers, it also makes that energy more resilient to storms that could damage lines and prevent the energy getting to its customers. Each type of energy generation from natural gas to coal to nuclear or renewables has its own strengths and weaknesses. By increasing the types and locations of generation sources, we are more resilient to outages and community energy would make our energy grid stronger for all.

For the first time in decades, Ohio is facing an increase in demand for energy and Ohioans are feeling this shift in their budgets with rising energy costs. Additionally, the more extreme temperatures we experience are putting everyone at risk for outages. This community energy bill is one valuable tool that Ohioans should have to help meet these challenges and we urge your support.

Thank you for your consideration, please reach out if you have any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

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