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## House Finance Committee

### Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 96 (Stewart)

Dan B. Brown, CP, CPG; President; Partners Environmental Consulting, Inc.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 96, the main operating budget for fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

My name is Dan B. Brown, CPG, CP, and I am the President and Founder of Partners Environmental Consulting, Inc. For the past 26 years, Partners has been helping businesses in Ohio and nationally with their environmental and safety needs. I am writing to you today to respectfully request the inclusion of continued funding for the Ohio Brownfield Remediation Program (BRP) in House Bill 96, the state's Main Operating Budget.

I helped author the Ohio Voluntary Action Program (VAP) rules in the 1990s and am well-acquainted with the BRP as it currently stands. As someone who is directly involved in this work, I strongly believe it is imperative for Ohio to continue the BRP to help ensure that Ohio can maintain its competitive advantage as a great place to do business. Having been an elected official, I understand demands are competing heavily with constraints when it comes to serving your constituency, but I am urging you to consider this important matter.

The Ohio General Assembly created the BRP in 2021 with an initial appropriation of \$350 million. Two (2) years later, lawmakers renewed the program with a second appropriation of \$350 million. According to the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC), to date, the program has been responsible for the clean-up or assessment of more than 600 brownfield sites in 86 of Ohio's 88 counties. Importantly, 285 of these projects are underway in counties with a population of fewer than 70,000 people, and 355 are in counties with a population of less than 150,000.

These results not only show that brownfields are indeed a statewide problem but also show that there are opportunities for new economic development and revitalization in every region of Ohio.

One such project is "Deeds Point," which we worked on in Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio. The redevelopment of this 17-acre property into an elementary school with track and field, green space, parking, and a public park had stalled after it was determined that soil impacts exceeded applicable standards. Funding from the BRP allowed Partners and the developer to not just bring the project to fruition, but to keep it on-time and on-budget, effectively and safely. The anticipated elementary school has since opened and we were able to submit a No Further Action (NFA) letter to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for site closure. Without the critical funding from the BRP, this would never have happened.

This is just one of many examples of projects that are currently underway across the state of Ohio.

As impressive as this work has been, the progress made over the past four years has just barely scratched the surface of what is needed to address brownfield remediation in Ohio. Of the grants that have been awarded since 2021, 279 have been assessment grants. Assessments just determine the scope of contamination that may exist on a site. The majority of these locations will need clean-up funds in order to ensure they are made available for future redevelopment opportunities.

This is why it is critical to continue funding for the BRP for at least the next two (2) years.

As proud as we are with the work that we have been able to accomplish with the BRP, there have been issues with the current operation of the program. The first come, first serve nature of the BRP leaves Ohio's smaller counties at a disadvantage when seeking funding for remediation projects in their communities. This is why a majority of the sites that will need clean-up funds in the future (170) are in counties with a population under 150,000.

State Representatives Thomas Hall and Bride Sweeney have proposed important programmatic changes to the BRP which will shift the program from a first come, first serve model to a merit-based system, which scores applications reviewed by a panel of experts working with the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD). This model mirrors Ohio's first Brownfield program, the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund (CORF). CORF was responsible for producing \$1.16 billion in one-time contributions and contributing \$1.4 billion annually to the state's Gross Domestic Product.

As someone who is directly involved in this work, I strongly believe it is imperative for Ohio to adopt these changes to help ensure that Ohio can maintain its competitive advantage as a great place to do business.

Please support a continued appropriation for the BRP of at least \$100-\$150 million per year, along with the programmatic changes being proposed by Representatives Hall and Sweeney. This investment will unlock untold potential on over 9,000 former commercial and industrial Brownfield sites across Ohio, while preserving agricultural land and green space from unnecessary development.

Chair Stewart and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony and to share our views on what it will take to create the tools and policy environment Ohio needs to thrive in the years to come.

Regards,



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