

Proponent Testimony for HB113 on Annexation: Local Government Committee
Jenny Hodge
Bethel Twp Resident

Chairwoman King, Vice Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims, and members of the Local Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB113 on annexation reform.

My name is Jenny Hodge, farm wife from Bethel Township. My husband and I got married right after college and made our home in Bethel in 1990 after graduating from The University of Dayton. We both worked as engineers and waited to have children until we could afford to buy a farm of our own. My husband left his job to farm full time. We raise corn, soybeans and wheat along with hay and cattle. We have 3 adult children. Our oldest, graduated from The Ohio State University in agronomy and is now back on the farm, farming full time.

I am the daughter, wife and mother of farmers, I have always played a supporting role. I try to do all that I can to make sure that they can continue to do what they love. I've struggled really hard with what I can say to you in 3 minutes to convey the love we have for farming. The hard work we put in to leave the soil better than we found it. The strong work ethic and love that comes from working the land. Our son has always said that he will never sell our farm.

He is now 28 and we have discussions with him about whether or not it is still practical to hold on to that dream. With the thousands of acres that Huber has already taken from our township, not only have we lost some of the most productive farmland in Ohio, but our livelihood is being threatened. Each one of the houses they build has a car that, on average, leaves its driveway 8 times a day, making our roads 10 times more dangerous. Also, if our farm equipment is in a wreck, we can't simply go to the dealer and get a new one. We could potentially lose an entire year of production. Another threat to our farming operation is that we're being taxed to death to support the school that now educates twice as many kids as it did when we made Bethel our home.

Back in 1990, it cost twice as much to own a 3 bedroom home in Bethel vs. just down the road in Huber. People were willing to pay more to live in our rural community with a good school system and close knit community. We knew our neighbors. We helped each other out. At that same time, Huber Heights was 5 years into their incorporation which they had done to stop Dayton from taking their ground. Now, they are being the same bad neighbor that Dayton was to them.

Bethel had land use plans. Expedited annexation put those plans in the shredder and we had no say. What Huber has done is nothing short of bullying, but more than that, if Ohio as a State, doesn't wake up and start getting REAL serious REAL quick about farmland preservation, the battle is going to be lost. As much as our family wants to continue farming, we are being forced out. As older landlords pass, the developers are buying up the land at dollar amounts no farmer could ever compete against. The result? Valuable farmland was lost, our roads are unsafe to travel on with large equipment, our school system is in shambles, our homes are no longer worth twice as much as in Huber and yet our taxes have skyrocketed. The sense of community is gone as everything is changing so quickly.

Ohio must wake up and get serious if we're going to stop this sprawl. It took over 250 years to develop some of the most productive farmland in the world. To see it being covered in concrete is absolutely devastating. Every farmer works to leave their land better for the next generation. If we don't do something quickly, the torch will be extinguished and no longer be able to be passed.

I beg you to stand up and take this first step to passing new laws that will protect our township from further development. Hard work and ingenuity built our farm and even harder work and more ingenuity are needed to insure we are able to continue farming in this township.

Never forget, more housing can always be built. More farmland can never be made. You need to act FAST, Ohio. This is just one step.

Thank you Chairwoman King and committee members for hearing my testimony today and thank you for the work you do for our state. I will be glad to answer questions if you have any for me.