

Proponent Testimony for HB113 On Annexation; Local Government Committee
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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 Taylor Watkins, and I proudly serve as an Organization Director for the Ohio Farm Bureau, representing the counties of Champaign, Clark, Darke, and Miami. Not only do I advocate for and serve the farmers and community members in this region, but I also call it home. Today, I am here to voice strong support for HB113 on behalf of our members and local leaders who have worked tirelessly to bring attention to the urgent need for annexation reform in Ohio.

The Ohio Farm Bureau is a grassroots organization — our policies are born directly from the concerns and priorities of our local members. For years, annexation has been one of the most discussed and debated issues among our farmers, landowners, and rural community leaders. House Bill 113 is a direct reflection of that grassroots process — this is our grassroots policy in action. Every year in Ohio, we lose thousands of acres of prime farmland to various causes, including annexation. Land that once fed our families, supported our local schools, and built strong communities is being paved over, parceled out, and permanently altered. Once it's gone, it's gone forever. And it's happening faster than ever, often without the voices of those who care most about that land having a real say. Farmers, who already operate on razor-thin margins, are often the first to feel the pressure. They're asked to sell. They're offered money they can't refuse. More than half the farmland in Ohio is rented rather than owned, and these farmers cannot compete with offers made to landowners. In some cases, farmland selling for \$12,000 an acre is suddenly valued at \$125,000 an acre by developers.

House Bill 113 gives farmers — and rural communities — a voice. It gives them a chance to be heard before their livelihoods and landscapes are changed forever. Far too often, we've seen expedited annexations move forward with little to no input from the people and communities most directly impacted.

HB113 takes meaningful steps to slow this trend and ensures local communities have a voice. It requires that expedited and municipality-initiated annexations truly serve the public good — as determined by the board of county commissioners. This ensures that annexations aren't approved solely for municipal expansion, but because they genuinely benefit the broader community. And it ensures that elected officials who are closest to the people have an active role in the decision-making process.

Our members and the communities they represent are not opposed to growth or development. This bill is about fairness. It's about giving townships a fair say, giving farmers a fair shot, and giving families the stability they deserve.

It doesn't stop development — it makes sure that development happens with care, with input, and with accountability.

HB113 reflects the clear priorities of our grassroots membership. On behalf of the Miami County Farm Bureau and the broader Farm Bureau family, I urge you to support this bill. Let's ensure the future of our land, our schools, and our communities is shaped by the people who live there.

Thank you, Chairwoman King and committee members, for hearing my testimony today, and thank you for your service to our state. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.