

Proponent testimony for HB 113 on annexation;

Wednesday April 30 2025 9:00 am

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 HB 113 on annexation reform.

My name is Jeff Morford, my wife and I have lived in Miami County, Bethel Township for well over 50 years.

For over 20 years the annexation laws have been heavily in favor of developers and cities wanting to expand their borders. Offering zero legal protection for citizens living in small rural townships.

Some annexations/developments have imposed unwanted and unsupported developments that the townships were not legally able to protest. Such is the situation with Bethel Township and Huber heights. Over the last 20 years, three very large scale annexations/high density developments, opposed by the citizens of Bethel Township, the three elected township trustees, and the three elected Miami county commissioners. The latest six months ago (300 acres 1400 house)

This latest annexed property needed nothing from Huber Heights other than the high density zoning. Schools, Police, Fire, EMS services, all currently provided, along with water and sewage available from the Miami County Sanitary Services.

Again, the developer, the Huber Heights city council and the Mayor imposing their will on a small disadvantaged community.

Disadvantaged because of the current annexation laws, literally tied the

hands and put a gag in the mouths of the citizens living in the 1309 townships across the state.

Please believe me the Huber Heights city council and the developer were both well aware of Bethel townships opposition, along with the opposition of Huber Heights citizens.

The current annexation law gives the city receiving the annexation petition ultimate authority to accept or reject the annexation/development. The decision makers being the city council members and mayor of Huber Heights. I do agree the city should have the right to examine the proposed annexation and development, after all this will have a major impact on their city. But the impact will even be greater in Bethel Township, yet we have no voice/no vote.

By default the Huber Height city council and its Mayor were voting as our representatives, they are making decisions for us, yet no Bethel Township residents voted for them. They are not obligated to us, they have no allegiance to us; they are not accountable to us; we cannot vote them out of office; we cannot sign a referendum petition if we disagree with their vote.

As with the logic; “no taxation without representation”, I believe there should be “no annexation without representation”.

I support annexation reform. I personally don't believe the bill goes far enough. I believe annexations are not an everyday occurrence and elected representatives are often in office for a short period of time, but the citizens are always there, having to live with the results of decisions made by elected officials, who might have a personal agenda, possibly not really representing the true desires of the community. So I

believe annexations and large scale development should be put on the ballot, so the individual citizens in both communities can make the decisions, needing majority approval from both communities to proceed.

We are the greatest nation on earth; we are the greatest nation because we are free. Taking away the freedom to choose is against the American way of life, questions our democracy, questions our freedoms, and puts our civil liberties at risk.

People living in their individual communities know what is best for their community.

In the end if one person or if one community loses their right to vote for reasons of convenience, profit, or tax revenue, then the day will come when many will lose the right to vote and chose what is best for their families and communities.

Three minutes is a very short time to relate the complexities associated with annexation.

I hope you all read my letter dated March 10 2025, which I mailed to all representatives and senators, which goes into more detail.

Thank you Chairwoman King and committee members for hearing my testimony today and thank you for the work you do for our state. I would also like to thank representative Newman and representative Bird for their courage to bring the rights of Ohio citizens living in townships to the forefront. I will be glad to answer any questions if you have any for me.