

## **HB 646 Study Commission on Technology and Innovation**

Southern Ohio – Brown, Adams, Clinton, and Scioto Counties

Chair and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

I am from Southern Ohio, and I am here speaking not just for Brown County, but for our neighboring counties as well — Adams, Clinton, and Scioto. We are rural communities. Many of our families rely on private wells. Many rely on springs. We farm this land. We depend on our aquifers and our waterways not as a theory, but as daily life.

I appreciate the idea of a study commission. We absolutely need more information about large-scale data centers and emerging technology infrastructure. But I need to be very clear: out here, we are not operating on a study timeline. We are in emergency mode.

These projects are not theoretical in our counties. Land is being cleared. Infrastructure is being modeled. Water and sewer upgrades are being discussed. Electrical grid upgrades are being planned. Zoning has been rewritten in some places before the public even knew what was being negotiated. By the time a study commission completes its work, the decisions may already be locked in.

In rural Southern Ohio, water is everything. Many residents are not on municipal systems. If an aquifer drops, there is no backup line to connect to. If a spring weakens, it does not come back easily. Large data centers can require massive amounts of water for cooling and operations. Even when described as “closed loop,” there are still withdrawals, evaporation losses, chemical treatment, and discharge. We deserve full, independent hydrological studies before any approvals move forward — not after.

Our farmland is also at stake. These projects require large tracts of land, heavy grading, soil compaction, and massive impervious surfaces. That changes drainage patterns. It increases runoff. It affects neighboring farms and downstream communities. Once farmland is converted to industrial use at this scale, it rarely returns to agriculture.

Our electrical grid is another serious concern. Rural electric systems were not built for hyper-scale industrial load. When one facility can draw the equivalent of a small city, that requires new substations, new transmission lines, and potentially new generation. We have not seen transparent modeling showing how that affects reliability or long-term rates for rural residents. Those answers should come before approvals, not years later.

There is also the issue of transparency. Across several of our counties, negotiations have happened under non-disclosure agreements. Projects have been discussed under code names. Infrastructure has been planned quietly. The public often learns what is happening

only after records requests are filed. Whether intentional or not, this creates distrust. This is the people's land. The people deserve to know what is being negotiated before zoning changes and incentives are approved.

We are not anti-technology. We are not anti-growth. We are asking for responsible planning and full transparency. We are asking for a pause on large-scale data center development in rural counties until comprehensive water, grid, environmental, and emergency response impacts are fully studied and publicly disclosed.

A study commission is a good first step. But study alone is not enough when construction timelines are moving faster than research. Rural communities should not be test sites for infrastructure that permanently alters water systems, farmland, and electrical grids without meaningful public consent.

Southern Ohio is not empty land waiting to be used. It is family farms, wells, springs, small towns, and generational homes. Once an aquifer is stressed or farmland is converted, there is no undo button.

We respectfully ask you to slow this down. Require transparency. Require independent impact studies. And give rural communities a real voice before irreversible decisions are made.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica Baker