

]House Ways and Means Committee  
June 17, 2025  
Opponent Testimony – HB 335  
William B. Judge, Mayor City of Barberton

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Troy and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 335.

I proudly serve as the Mayor of the City of Barberton, representing 25,000 residents and a community providing full city services-Police, Fire/EMS, Water Collection & Distribution, Building Department and a city with a thriving school system. Like all cities in Ohio, we fulfill critical and state-mandated public safety and utility roles for our constituents. If enacted, HB 335's abolition of inside millage will cut just over \$1.9 million from Barberton's General Fund — a loss that will severely cripple our ability provide these services.

Such significant revenue loss would force us to take drastic actions, including:

- Impairing Barberton's ability to fund essential safety & emergency operations and special response teams, as well as public safety across the community;
- Cutting vital staff, who are essential to our operations;
- Eliminating fundamental and critical services to our residents;
- Reducing our ability to provide projects and programs to the public, jeopardizing their safety, health, and well-being;

Further, the Ohio Constitution provides a framework to govern local government taxing and debt issuance authority. Article XII, Section 11 of the Ohio Constitution requires the State and its political subdivisions to levy a tax to support all bond indebtedness. Under section 133.25 of Ohio's Uniform Public Securities Law, bondholders have an ability to mandamus the collection of those taxes. The elimination of inside millage will undoubtedly undermine Ohio's credit worthiness and stifle economic development and infrastructure improvements for years to come.

We are aware of this legislature's interest in pushing local governments to consolidate services to save money and reduce tax burdens. I am proud to share the City of Barberton and our neighboring communities have been at the forefront of such efforts for many years. We are now part of a joint dispatch & Information Technology center. Our Building Department, provides services to the City of Barberton and the City of Norton and approximately 40,000 residents. We also provide water and sanitary sewer services for our residents, the City of Norton and

are in discussions for further expansion, we are proud of our high-quality services that are provided with maximum efficiency and conservative fiscal management.

The City of Barberton cannot raise its income tax without a vote of the electorate. We operate our city on a 2.25 % income tax rate, with .25% earmarked for road resurfacing and reconstruction projects. We have been negatively affected by the loss of the local government fund, unfunded mandates, and other financial cuts that we cannot absorb. The loss of another \$1.9 million will leave us with no ability to comply with the very mandates we are required to uphold.

In the City of Barberton, we have prioritized fiscal restraint for decades. We have consolidated services, worked with our neighboring communities, continued to be fiscally responsible. Simply put, we are already doing what you are asking local governments to do. Yet this proposal would devastate our budget and punish us despite our longstanding fiscal conservancy.

It is unquestionable that homeowners across Ohio are feeling the burden of inflation and higher living costs. However, HB 335 would force the City of Barberton into a no-win situation — unable to maintain basic city services including public safety services while lacking the authority to replace lost revenue. Further still, when assessing the entirety of property taxes throughout the state, city inside millage is minimal. It is difficult to comprehend eliminating inside millage in exchange for minimal relief when the real-world outcome is a decimated city services including public safety.

We urge you to consider the unintended consequences of HB 335. City services including public safety services will be deeply and unavoidably impacted. We ask for your partnership in identifying a more balanced solution that protects both taxpayers and the fundamental services they rely upon.

Should this committee and this General Assembly choose to pursue this method of property tax relief, we urge you to consider the City of Barberton's limitations and our long history of fiscally conservative operations. This legislation makes a special exemption for townships in recognition of their revenue limitations. We ask you to consider such an exemption for cities in recognition of our charter limitations.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William B. Jettse". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.