

Ohio Senate Energy Committee
Interested Party Testimony
Senate Bill 2: Increase power generation; improve Ohio's electric grid

Senator Brian M. Chavez, Chair
Senator Bill Reineke, Primary Sponsor
Senator Kent Smith, Ranking Member

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB2. My name is Linda New. I serve on the Northeast Ohio Sierra Club Executive Committee and on the Board of Trustees of FaCT: Faith Communities Together for a Sustainable Future. I submit this testimony as a high school teacher, an informed constituent, and as an interested party.

Ohio needs an organized and effective approach to energy generation. As you develop this energy generation policy for Ohioans in SB2, I urge you to include greater support for safe, renewable energy sources, for energy efficiency, and for healthy communities and natural areas in Ohio.

As is documented in the State of the Climate 2024 Report, we are witnessing a rapidly changing climate, driven by ever-increasing greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere. As Ohio revamps its approach to energy generation, understanding climate variability and the causes of these changes in our climate is crucial. In order to protect our air, water, and soil and to promote healthy communities, we must optimize renewable energy generation in Ohio. We need to **meet rising demands for energy, to provide clean jobs in our burgeoning renewable energy sector, and to protect our public lands and community health.**

Meet Ohio's Increased Demand for Electricity

With 175 data centers currently in Ohio and more proposed, we will see rising demand for energy. SB2 is intended to increase power generation and improve Ohio's electric grid. Support for geothermal and solar power near our data centers is an important addition to Ohio's plan for growth in this area. Clean, renewable energy generation can help meet the increased demands for electricity and lessen the strain on our grid while also avoiding the environmental and community damage done by the extraction, transporting, and burning of fossil fuels.

We must allow solar, wind, and geothermal power in Ohio to thrive in order to meet our energy needs. There is currently \$53.7 million in solar subsidies waiting to be invested in solar energy generation in Ohio. I ask that you prioritize the use of that money for solar projects. The Solar for Schools provision in SB2 is a first step. However, providing grant funding to public schools that optimize solar energy generation rather than providing loans would better support these efforts. Additionally, the Ohio Power Siting Board should adopt rules providing for the accelerated review of clean, renewable electric utility projects including solar, wind, and geothermal energy. We can't afford to keep renewables out of the market any more.

We must allow local governments to designate brownfields or former coal mines as priority investment areas within which property tax and siting incentives are provided for utility projects involving solar, wind, and geothermal energy generation.

Provide Clean Jobs in Our Burgeoning Renewable Energy Sector

Recent developments in battery storage will allow consistent availability of solar, wind, and geothermal energy. It is important to include provisions in SB2 to support and accelerate the installation of improved battery storage systems. As demand for energy rises, Ohio's sustainable energy sector will need the clear advantages that are provided by storage of energy produced through solar, wind, and geothermal power.

In 2024, two bipartisan bills with extensive community support came before the House Energy Committee. The two bills were: HB197 (**Establish community solar pilot** and solar development programs), and HB79 (Permit electric distribution utilities to **establish energy efficiency** and demand reduction portfolios). Key provisions in these two popular bills should now be included in SB2.

HB79 was a voluntary energy efficiency bill allowing Ohio's utilities to run efficiency programs for residential and small commercial customers. The bill did not force utilities to run efficiency programs, nor require customers to participate, but utilities said they hoped to bring back new and improved efficiency programs. HB79 was passed by the Ohio House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis in June 2024.

HB197 was a bill that would have enhanced Ohio's energy resiliency. Key provisions of HB197 included promotion of clean, renewable energy based on local need, and the creation of local jobs in solar energy installation and maintenance. HB197 would have turned idle or contaminated brownfields into assets that could have generated local tax revenue and helped underserved communities in rural and urban areas. We need these key components of sustainable energy generation from HB197 to be included in the current SB2 to protect consumers, and to save Ohioans money while meeting their energy needs.

Ohioans need provisions of these bipartisan bills to be included in the current SB2 to help lower rising energy costs, to meet our growing energy needs without polluting our air, water, and soil, to create jobs and new local tax revenues, and to increase our grid reliability and energy resilience. By integrating components of these two bipartisan bills into our current SB2, Ohio will have an opportunity to take a leading role in the renewable energy sector.

SB2 aims to ensure increased power generation at competitive rates. Right now, solar and wind energy generation is competitively priced, safe, clean, and widely supported in Ohio. Renewable energy is winning in the marketplace. Ohio is positioned to be a leader in this growing and popular industry,

Protect Our Public Lands and Public Health

As SB2 is discussed and developed in committee, it is imperative that consideration be given to your responsibility to protect our public lands. Your constituents are asking you to **guard our natural areas**

and to build clean, healthy, and thriving state parks and nature preserves. 98% of the 600 public comments recently submitted to the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission opposed fracking under Ohio's public lands. As one commenter wrote, "No fracking should be done on public lands. Those lands were set aside by Ohioans for the enjoyment of the public, not to make money for companies, especially those out of state."

SB2 should immediately **end Ohio Valley Electrical Cooperative subsidies** that prop up outdated, unwanted, and polluting coal plants. SB2 should include consideration of **dangerous externalities of fracking** such as the disposal of toxic brine waste, the release of methane into the atmosphere throughout the extraction, transport, and burning of fracked gas, the excessive use of Ohio's water which threatens our water table in a time of drought, and the destruction of our natural areas.

SB2 must consider the devastating and well-documented health impacts of fracking in our state. Living near fracking well pads causes an increase in respiratory illness, low birth weights, cancer, immune disorders, and endocrine disruption. The Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking and Associated Gas and Oil Infrastructure has compiled evidence of the damage done to individuals and communities by fracking. These health impacts are disproportionately borne by low-income communities, communities of color, and other marginalized groups.

SB2 could be impactful legislation. Your constituents deserve an energy policy that prioritizes clean, renewably generated electricity and establishes energy efficiency standards. By including greater support of solar, wind and geothermal power in SB2, all Ohioans will benefit from increasing energy generation, taking a lead in the renewable energy sector, and protecting public lands, natural areas and the well-being of our communities. I urge you to act in the best interest of Ohio voters and include support for solar, wind, and geothermal energy generation and energy efficiency standards in SB2.

Sincerely,
Linda New
Ohio Senate District 24