



OHIO CONSERVATIVE ENERGY FORUM

Sub. S. B. 2 Ohio Senate Energy Committee

Chair Chavez, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Energy Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony today on Substitute Senate Bill 2. My name is Shayna Fritz, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Conservative Energy Forum. Our mission is to advocate for a commonsense, market-driven approach to energy policy that promotes economic growth, ensures reliability, and protects consumer choice. We appreciate the legislature's ongoing efforts to modernize Ohio's energy policies and support reinvestment in communities impacted by economic transitions.

First and foremost, we commend the sponsors of SB 2 for their leadership in crafting a bill that strengthens Ohio's energy landscape. This legislation makes essential updates to public utility regulations, enhances transparency, and promotes economic redevelopment through priority investment areas. These provisions are crucial for ensuring that Ohio remains a competitive and appealing location for investments in energy infrastructure.

We are particularly encouraged by the bill's establishment of priority investment areas for brownfields and former coal mines. Providing tax exemptions and streamlining regulatory processes for these sites will attract much-needed private investment, revitalize local economies, and repurpose underutilized land for productive use. This initiative represents a forward-thinking approach to economic development, particularly in communities that have been historically dependent on coal and other traditional industries.

Another important component of SB 2 is the Solar for Schools Program, which will help educational institutions reduce their energy costs and provide students with hands-on learning opportunities in clean energy. By offering low-interest loans for solar panel installations, the bill empowers schools to take control of their energy usage while contributing to a more resilient and diversified electricity grid.

Additionally, we support the provisions in SB 2 that ensure greater consumer protections and accountability in public utilities regulation. The requirement for refunds when charges are deemed unlawful, the increased transparency in PUCO proceedings, and the restrictions on undisclosed utility settlements are all steps in the right direction to safeguard ratepayers and maintain trust in Ohio's energy market.

However, we believe that this bill can go one step further to ensure that the bill achieves its full potential. We respectfully urge the committee to consider an **exemption for solar and wind energy projects located in these priority investment areas from the restrictions imposed by Senate Bill 52**. As currently written, S.B. 52 grants county commissions broad authority to prohibit or limit new solar and wind developments. While local input is important, this restriction disproportionately affects renewable energy, while other forms of generation, such as natural gas and coal, do not face similar barriers. This imbalance creates an uneven playing field and



OHIO CONSERVATIVE ENERGY FORUM

discourages private investment in Ohio's renewable energy sector, particularly in areas that stand to benefit the most from economic revitalization.

Allowing solar and wind projects to proceed without additional regulatory hurdles in these designated priority investment areas would:

- **Encourage private investment and job creation** in regions that need economic diversification following the decline of coal.
- **Maximize land-use flexibility**, ensuring that former coal sites and brownfields can be repurposed for the highest-value economic use.
- **Promote energy market competition**, enabling all generation sources to compete fairly and ensuring that Ohio's energy mix remains diverse and resilient.
- **Advance Ohio's energy independence** by fostering local, homegrown power generation that reduces reliance on out-of-state energy imports.

Furthermore, by maintaining a generation-neutral approach, Ohio can attract businesses that prioritize sustainability in their operations, enhancing the state's competitiveness in economic development. We propose the following amendments to Sub. S.B. 2 to achieve this:

1. **Explicitly exempt solar and wind projects within priority investment areas from S.B. 52 restrictions**, ensuring these sites can be developed without additional local bans.

SB 2 is a well-crafted bill that makes important strides in modernizing Ohio's energy regulations, fostering economic redevelopment, and increasing transparency in utility oversight. We commend the Senate Energy Committee for its leadership in these areas and are excited for what this bill can do for the state's energy landscape.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and work you have already done on this bill. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have. I may be reached at sfritz@ohcef.org.