



House Bill 54 Opposition Testimony
Jimmy Stewart – President
Ohio Gas Association
March 4, 2025

Chairman Patton, Vice Chairman Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee, my name is Jimmy Stewart, and I am the President of the Ohio Gas Association. The OGA is a natural gas trade organization which represents over 30 natural gas distribution, transmission companies, and cooperatives in Ohio.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 54, Ohio's biennial transportation budget. Although the House did make some helpful changes to the bill, OGA members remain strongly opposed to language related to the abandonment of telecommunications and utility structures for the following reasons:

Resource Allocation Impact: Enforcing the removal of abandoned lines to comply with this government mandate will divert significant resources, including time, manpower, equipment, and money away from expanding and improving Ohio's infrastructure. These resources would be better allocated to building new systems to serve the growing needs of Ohioans, rather than focusing on the costly and time-consuming process of removing abandoned infrastructure for an undetermined benefit to the public or customers. OGA is unaware of significant issues with ODOT related to abandoned infrastructure and is uncertain why a legislative fix is needed.

Damages to Existing Infrastructure: The removal of abandoned lines can lead to significant damage to not only the roadways but also other active critical infrastructure that may be located adjacent to or even beneath them. These unintended consequences will result in substantial remediation costs that could far exceed the expected benefits of removing the structures. Repairing these damages would further drain resources and delay other essential projects.

Safety and Collaboration: Safety remains the highest priority for OGA members. OGA is actively engaged in collaborative efforts, such as those through the Ohio Underground Damage Prevention Coalition (OUDPC), to identify and implement solutions for issues, including abandoned lines. OGA strongly believes that this ongoing process will yield more thoughtful, comprehensive, and effective solutions, which will ultimately help reduce damages and increase safety across the state. OGA urges that this process be allowed to continue developing, so we can reach a consensus that best serves all stakeholders.

Given these concerns, OGA respectfully opposes language related to abandonment of telecommunications and utility structures, and instead favors further collaborative efforts to address these important issues in a more comprehensive manner. Currently, there are related

discussions taking place with the Abandoned Lines Subcommittee of the OUDPC. That committee brings contractor, gas, electric, PUCO and OHIO811 leadership experience to that discussion, with a committee open to all governmental, contractor and utility types. The Abandoned Lines Subcommittee is progressing toward finding suitable language that can be agreed upon and supported by the OUDPC that can be moved forward for legislative changes. With progress being made at that level, with input from excavators at the contractor and utility level, we feel it is important for those voices to be heard and to allow the positive work from this committee to play out to completion.

While ODOT has never approached OGA about its concerns with abandoned facilities, OGA would be pleased to collaborate with ODOT in that process. Utilizing the OUDPC process would avoid unintended consequences, and future legislative cleanup, of these unexpected new changes being imposed during the compressed timeframe associated with the transportation budget. The important safety and practical issues posed by the remaining language deserve a fuller review and warrant removal of the language from the transportation budget bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your attention to this matter and your commitment to improving Ohio's infrastructure and safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jimmy Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jimmy Stewart
President, Ohio Gas Association