



**Representative Terrence Upchurch
10th House District**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

More than 12 years ago this legislature passed Senate Bill 353 allowing for the creation of county land reutilization corporations, also known as county land banks. The bill that passed in December of 2008 initially only allowed my county, Cuyahoga County, to establish such a land bank. In 2010 with a passage of House Bill 515 that permission to create a county land bank was granted to any county over 60,000 in population. Several years later—in 2015-- the population limitation was removed altogether, again by this legislature—giving every county the opportunity to start a land bank.

What began as a single land bank in one county has now expanded to 58 additional counties in the state of Ohio. The map that I have distributed to all of you shows where these land banks operate. A book written by the founders of this movement, former Cuyahoga County Treasurer Jim Rokakis and his co -author Gus Frangos is being made available to members of this committee through a grant provided to the Ohio Land Bank Association by Rock Ventures and Dan Gilbert. This book details the birth and growth of land banks and discusses their work in large and small counties from Cuyahoga and Hamilton to smaller counties like Van Wert, Lawrence and Scioto. Thirteen counties in all are featured in this book. The indexes on Pages 124 and 125 show the impact of this movement on every county in the state, because while not every county has a land bank, monies

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raised by this effort have helped every county in the State of Ohio. When totaled, the amount of monies raised through this land bank effort exceed \$400 million and have resulted in the removal of approximately 40,000 blighted and abandoned properties. But there is so much more to do, and so much that land banks are ideally positioned to accomplish.

Land banks have not only played a critical role in demolishing vacant and abandoned structures throughout the state, but have also played a critical role in repositioning and repurposing not only the land made vacant by these demolitions, but other vacant properties in our communities. Monies raised thus far have been limited to residential blight, but Ohio's problem with vacant and abandoned properties is much deeper than abandoned homes. We estimate that Ohio has at least 75-80,000,000 square feet of tax delinquent, abandoned commercial properties. In my county alone, Cuyahoga County that number is over 11,000,000 square feet. But this is not just a big city problem. Our studies around the state shows vacant factories and commercial buildings in town as small as Sydney, in Shelby County or abandoned buildings in even the smallest counties in the state, like the village of Pomeroy, in Meigs County, where not one but two hospital buildings that have been abandoned have fallen into complete disrepair. I have prepared for this committee photos and examples of vacant and abandoned properties in cities as big as Cincinnati and Cleveland and Dayton, but also towns like Coalton, Wellston, Plymouth and Mingo Junction. These eyesores serve as a stark reminder of what used to be right in these communities, but now of what is

so wrong—communities stuck in their past that can't move forward because of these abandoned properties.

Statewide this is a multi-billion dollar problem, but most of these communities don't have a dime, or relatively few dimes and are not in a position to do anything about these problems. Thus far, the monies that have been raised to remove this blight have come from a legal settlement directed by then Attorney general Mike DeWine in 2012, and federal dollars through a program called the Hardest Hit Fund, and dollars that have been raised by local governments, through their limited general fund opportunities--and counties like Cuyahoga --which set aside 50 million dollars in 2014. To date, the state of Ohio has not contributed any funds, no dollars whatsoever to deal with this crisis of abandoned properties. We can't continue to rely on the federal government or communities at the local level, especially since so many of these local communities are cash strapped. We need the state to pitch in.

This bill calls for \$50 million to be administered by the Department of Administrative Services. It is not solely dedicated to demolition; in fact it is categorized as nuisance abatement dollars because land banks—contrary to popular opinion--have not only been engaged solely in demolition. On the contrary. They have also been engaged in significant restoration projects and they played a role in major efforts like the creation of an Amazon Fulfillment Center in North Randall Ohio. The land banks I have worked with are seeking

flexibility that allow this money to be used to address commercial and industrial blight, residential blight, but also redevelopment opportunities where they exist in their respective communities.

