



**Ohio House of Representatives
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Opponent Testimony
House Bill 201**

**Tracy Freeman, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
April 21, 2021**

Chairman Stephens, Vice-chair Stewart, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as an opponent to House Bill 201. I am Tracy Freeman, Director of Government Relations at The Nature Conservancy in Ohio.

The Nature Conservancy is a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, government, non-profit entities, and local communities to develop pragmatic, market-based solutions to conservation challenges, including water quality, environmental habitat degradation/fragmentation and climate change. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters.

House Bill 201 guarantees that every Ohioan has the right to obtain natural gas services by preventing political subdivisions from passing any ordinance, resolution, or building code to limit the use of natural gas. The Nature Conservancy opposes this bill because it is unnecessary. Ohioans already have the right to choose natural gas and the option to shop around for their preferred energy supplier. Even cities that have an aggregation program for their residents are required to offer the ability to opt-out of the aggregation program and choose their own energy supplier. At a time when this General Assembly continues to express concern about excess and unnecessary regulations, we do not need House Bill 201.

The General Assembly continues to consider narrowly defined, often short-sighted energy bills that moves us further away from creating a fair playing field for the entire energy sector in Ohio. This is one of many bills currently being considered that attempts to restrict the use and/or expansion of renewable energy. While being promoted as protecting people's right to use natural gas, it disregards people's right to have more access to all other energy sources. Consistently opinion polls over the past 4-5 years indicate more Ohioan's desire access to renewable energy which has the natural gas industry concerned, but this bill goes against free-market principles and allows the General Assembly to choose winners and losers. This bill is a solution looking for a problem as there are no cities in Ohio that have banned the use of natural gas.

There are environmental and health problems facing Ohioan's due to impacts of climate change. Many local leaders in Ohio's cities are trying to address these problems through a variety of sustainability initiatives, including reducing carbon emissions from energy consumption. This bill limits the options

available to local municipalities as they continue to experience the impacts of climate change. We all know of the record-breaking changes in weather patterns—2019 concluded the hottest decade ever recorded. In addition to stressing natural habitats, higher temperatures harm air quality as emissions from cars, industry and other sources mix with heat and lead to ground-level ozone, which can pose serious health risks – especially to those with respiratory conditions like asthma which increasingly affects children. Without question, access to clean air is an environmental determinant of health. By increasing the use of low-carbon energy sources, cities can decrease emissions and improve air quality.

I would like to stress that The Nature Conservancy believes in an “all of the above” approach to energy. We recognize the important role that existing sources of energy provide and the limitations of certain types of renewable energy. We also see what is happening globally, read the poll results, and know what businesses are demanding. Ohio can, and should be, a leader in the energy space. House Bill 201 is not part of an overall need for the state to develop a comprehensive energy policy. The on-again, off-again energy policies we have passed over the past few years often hinder economic development and solutions for a healthier Ohio, and most certainly send conflicted messages to investors. Developing a true comprehensive energy plan will allow us to harness all the potential we have as a state to be a leader in lower carbon energy sources and respond to current and future demand for a forward-thinking energy portfolio. We have no doubt Ohio’s policymakers, businesses and manufacturers, municipalities, environmental and conservation groups, consumer advocacy agencies and all the others that have been a part of the process can come together to craft an approach that will better respond to what Ohioans want and need. Do not be daunted by the idea of a comprehensive approach. Ohioans have shown they embrace innovation, challenges, and clean energy. We offer our organization’s help to the General Assembly to create an inclusive approach that reinforces lower carbon goals, encourages the economic benefits of clean energy, incentivizes new technology to address current challenges related to energy storage, remove impediments to growth, and sends a clear message that Ohio is open for business.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to House Bill 201. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Tracy Freeman
Director of Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
6375 Riverside Drive, Suite 100
Dublin, OH 43017
Email: Tracy.Freeman@tnc.org