

**Ohio House of Representatives
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Opponent Testimony
House Bill 192**

**Leo Almeida, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
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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 192. I am Leo Almeida, Senior Policy Associate 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 192 bars any local government from “prohibiting or limiting” electricity generation from fossil fuels or the construction or use of any oil or gas pipeline. This bill will prevent political subdivisions from passing any ordinance, resolution, or building code to limit the use of fossil fuels. This bill will also prevent community aggregation programs that are only implemented after being approved by local voters in an election. The Nature Conservancy opposes this bill because it is unnecessary. Ohioans already have the right to choose natural gas or any source of energy because they have 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 192.

The General Assembly continues to consider narrowly defined, often short-sighted energy bills that move 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. Opinion polls over the past 4-5 years consistently indicate more Ohioans desire access to renewable energy which likely has the natural gas industry concerned, but this bill goes against free-market principles that many in our General Assembly continue to espouse and picks 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 fossil fuels.

There are environmental and health problems facing Ohioans due to 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 try to do what's best for their own communities who continue to experience the tangible impacts of climate change. We all know of the record-breaking changes in weather patterns—2019 concluded the hottest decade ever recorded, record rainfall events causing flooding, and damage to aging infrastructure not designed to handle the extreme weather events. 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. Why would we not allow communities to have options to choose cleaner, more sustainable energy sources for themselves?

I would like to stress that The Nature Conservancy recognizes the need currently for an “all of the above” approach to energy. We know 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 192 does not move Ohio forward and is not part of a comprehensive energy policy which Ohio desperately needs. It is clear that many in this General Assembly seem to only advocate for local control for cities when it aligns with particular industries or issues that are politically beneficial. 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 business developers and investors. Crafting 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 192. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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