

Joanna Clippinger
Preble County
Proponent Testimony - House Bill 118
House Public Utilities Committee
March 9, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chairman Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee. My name is Joanna Clippinger. I am a lifelong Republican who strongly believes in private property rights, small government, and local control. My husband and I are farmers from Preble County. Our farm has been recognized as an Ohio Historic Family Farm by the Department of Agriculture because it has been owned and operated by my family for over 100 years.

For generations, we have faced droughts, disease, weak markets, and many other factors that have threatened our livelihood. My family has always been able to survive those uncontrollable adversities, and we have continued to have a successful farming operation that will be passed to the next generation. In fact, my daughter purchased land adjacent to our farm, preparing herself to be the keeper of our family's legacy for future generations.

Unfortunately, my family is now facing a new threat to our farm's sustainability. A 1,000-acre solar power plant is proposed to be built directly next to our farm. I know that our neighbor has a right to make decisions on how his land is used. I fully believe in private property rights; however, a person's rights end when it impacts the rights of others. Fencing off 1,000 acres of neighboring farm ground for solar panels will negatively impact the productivity of our farm.

Farmers in Preble County rely heavily on field tile to control the runoff of the land. The solar company plans to set the legs of each solar panel rack 10 feet deep into the ground, inevitably breaking drainage tiles. We understand from an OSU extension agent that the rule of thumb is 170 legs (or "piles") per acre. Thus, the Alamo project which I abut will have around 156,230 piles driven into the ground. This could make our land waterlogged or perhaps eroded. Either way, our land would not be farmable.

According to a wind energy and wildlife administrator with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, fencing off such a large amount of acreage will change the movement and feeding habits of the local wildlife, resulting in more deer, raccoons and other wildlife eating our crops and more coyotes preying on our cattle. Losing crop yields and livestock directly affect our farm's profit. My husband is a full-time farmer and our livelihood depends on the productivity of our land. Yes, my neighbor certainly has property rights, but so do we.

Because I wanted to defend my property rights and protect our farm income, I contacted my township trustees, my county commissioners, my state senator and my state representative to express my concerns. Quickly, I learned that our elected officials have little to no control over the land in our township, our county, or even our state when it comes to the production of renewable energies. If I wanted my voice to be heard by the people who make such decisions, I had to hire a lawyer to bring my concerns to the energy decision makers of our state government, the Ohio Power Siting Board.

The OPSB Board is certainly well-meaning but, to my knowledge, they have never visited my township. I understand there are at least twenty-four utility-scale solar projects under review by the OPSB as of today and more are coming. I fail to believe that staff resources are adequate to examine and understand the issues with the same competence as the local community. In addition, we question decision-makers who have no vested interest in the lives or well-being of the residents of our county. Worse yet, these people will never have to be held accountable to Ohio voters for their decisions.

Again, as an Ohio citizen, I had to spend thousands of dollars to hire a lawyer for someone in our government to hear my opinion. That goes against the very principles of democracy. Our petitions to our government should not be based on if we can afford legal representation or not. As Ohio law stands now, it seems that only the privileged can voice their concerns to government decision makers.

As I stated earlier, my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents often did not have control of the factors against them while farming our land. By speaking today about my support of House Bill 118, I have a voice in protecting the land that has given so much to generations of my family. House Bill 118 gives the everyday citizen a voice in how renewable energies affect his or her community. I personally have many concerns about a large-scale solar facility being built next to me; however, if I knew, through a ballot initiative, that the majority of my fellow township residents supported its construction, I would be willing to accept the will of the people in my community. This bill embodies my core political beliefs: property rights, small government and, most importantly, local control. In conclusion, I would like to quote the honorable representative from District 53: "Local government is the best government."