

Ohio House Public Utilities Committee
Testimony of Rollie Wolfrum
House Bill 118
March 23, 2021

Good morning Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith and members of the House Public Utilities. My name is Rolland Wolfrum and I'm a resident of Defiance County, Ohio. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony on House Bill 118.

When a solar company approached us about a solar farm, I listened because we are always trying to improve our profitability and be good stewards of the Earth. One of my early concerns was how it was going to affect our friends and neighbors. We insisted on some sort of a "good neighbor policy" and they obliged.

<https://youtu.be/u7N8JgWiQQU>

After watching the above video and learning more about the 300' setbacks and other features, I was very satisfied that this would be great for my community. It would bring in around \$500,000 for the schools and hopefully relieve local property tax liabilities. With a solar project like this, the neighborhood would have less dust, noise, odor, pesticides, traffic, and less pollution than farming creates. We would benefit from cleaner air, cleaner waterways, year-round vegetation, increased pollinators, more wildlife and biodiversity.

As you know, farmers pay a lot of taxes to the schools in Ohio. Over the last 9 years I have created spreadsheets to calculate my property taxes as a percentage of income. Ten percent of my income goes to the local schools in the form of property tax. Rural schools have a difficult time passing a 1% income tax levy, but yet farmers are paying a substantially higher amount. In the last nine years, 16% of my total income went to property tax plus 15% in FICA tax and when you add in our federal and state taxes, over 50% of our income goes to taxes. The half million dollars generated by the proposed solar project would help the local property owners substantially.

I remember when I was 5 years old, driving tractor with my dad. I was one proud 5-year-old. I knew at an early age what I wanted to be when I grew up. Three days after graduation, I started a factory job because I knew it took a lot of money and hard work to become a farmer. My vacations from the factory job were spent working on the farm. I didn't mind that because growing up we rarely had a vacation. My parents worked hard and taught me to do the same. My entire life, I've almost always had two jobs.

I've seen a lot of changes to our small community over the years. The local grocery store, fresh produce market, convenience store, the hardware and auto dealership are all gone and they are never coming back. Farming has changed also, with no-till, cover crops, GPS, auto track and improved seed technology. One thing that hasn't changed is that it still takes a lot of hard work and long hours to run a farm. Many urban people moving to the country have unrealistic expectations of rural life. As with everything, change is inevitable. My father went from horses to small tractors, then to large tractors that steer themselves before he passed in 2009. I've transitioned from plowing to planting no-till with cover crops and irrigation, all in an effort to be more productive and a better steward. I consider myself

a progressive conservative. In 2012 I bought a hybrid car. The first moment when the gasoline engine turned off and the electric switched on, I felt very futuristic. Solar is the future; I'd like to be a part of that. I joke with my friends that I want to live to be 142 years old, so I can see the year 2100. I know I probably won't make it, but that's not a goal you want to set too low. Imagine the change we'll see in the next 20-30 years! Change is good.

However, passing HB 118 sets a precedent for future referendums relative to property owners. If the main concern is that of "not in my backyard" ... we must understand that the concern is self-serving not for the greater good. Many opponents to solar are concerned with the view being altered. My corn, in a good year, will block more of their view than any solar panels will. When railroads and electricity came through the country side, I'm sure someone complained, but they adapted for the greater good. I'm not trying to tell anyone what to do with their property, but it seems hypocritical for them to tell me what I can do with my property. With all due respect, my land isn't their landscape or their backyard.

Another concern for HB118 is lack of representation. For example, my mother will be able to vote on this, but I live in the adjoining township and have no say regarding my own property. With this bill I won't be able to vote, but a non-property owner will. There is a substantial cost to owning and maintaining property. A renter with multiple voters in their household will have more say than my mother or I do and we have skin in the game. Compare this to a corporation with shareholders, would a minority shareholder have controlling interest in significant management decisions?

If THIS bill passes... what's next? Maybe I'll have to quit farming at night or not start till 8am. Will I not be allowed to spread manure or spray pesticides because of the odor? Maybe I'll have to quit running my drying fans at night. Will I have to stop Harvest because the dust might interrupt their Saturday afternoon BBQ? Maybe I'll not be able to drive my equipment down the road when they are going to work. Will I be able to limit who can hunt on my property? Maybe I'll not be able to plant my crop because someone has allergies or it alters their view. Farming comes with a lot of risks: the weather, crop prices, global issues, input prices, increased taxes and health risks from the elements and stress from the unknown. Will we now have to deal with referendums telling us what we can or cannot do with our property? Where will it end?

The Power Siting board already calls for notices to affected property owners and local hearings. This Bill adds layers of bureaucracy. This does not seem logical to me after the senate just passed SB9 "to cut burdensome red tape".

Also, in this bill it appears that solar and wind is being singled out... but not fossil fuels or nuclear energy. So where do we invest our energy dollars? Bailing out a nuclear power plant benefits one community, but if you encourage and support solar energy, hundreds of communities will benefit. By supporting solar by not passing HB118, you will also be sharing the wealth created from this opportunity with the communities you serve.

I know you want to do the right thing, but please do not pass this bill. Change is coming. We should not make it harder for clean energy, we should make it easier. We need to be building the power grid of the future, instead of the grid of the past. That future grid is much more resilient and decentralized than a grid that relies on big power plants. By spreading out the energy generating capabilities you will also spread the risk of one large location causing a failure.

There is little to no industry in our rural communities and we may not have another opportunity like this. The more road blocks that businesses encounter, the greater the possibility that they will choose a friendlier state. I support keeping investments in Ohio. This bill is not only anti property, but it is also anti-business.

In closing, I have worked many days straight through the night, over 24 hours with no sleep. Watching the sun come up is a great feeling of accomplishment. The wind and sun are a part of our natural resources and utilizing clean energy would be an equally rewarding sense of Accomplishment. I should have a right to use my property how I deem best and this bill takes that right away.

Thank you for Your attention.