

Rebecca Williams – Highland County

SB 52 Proponent Testimony

House Public Utilities Committee

June 22, 2021

I am writing as a concerned citizen, landowner, and registered voter of Highland County. I am also a member of the group: Clinton/Highland County Citizens Concerned about Solar Farms that has over 1,000 members and growing every day. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support and my concerns. Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Committee; I am Rebecca Williams and I urge you to move swiftly to pass SB 52. I live in the heart of Highland County. I am writing because over 20 square miles of prime Highland County farmland is being sold or long-term-leased for the purpose of environment-degrading solar panel installation. I am not going to waste time painting picturesque scenes being turned into dismal wastelands. There has been enough progression of the solar industry into Ohio for you to witness that devastation firsthand without my description. I encourage you to do so. It will not take much time to drive past all this destruction because there are at least seven projects slated for Highland County alone with at least 4 having already broke ground for construction and other projects in various stages in adjacent counties immediately beyond our borders. Once productive farmland now lost to an industry that is an insufficient energy producer for our area's climate, requiring back-up energy supplies, and would not even be profitable without the government subsidies which are comprised of our tax money. As I am sure you know, most of these energy companies are ultimately foreign owned. The installation process is largely using immigrant labor, thus not even creating temporary employment in the area. All being done to power cities far from our area and often even in a different state. These industrial solar fields are not only forever changing our environment, but they also are limiting the amount of tillable farmland available to future generations. The burden of these projects being placed upon us for the public need of the big cities that have chosen to develop their industrial wastelands into projects that are revenue generating instead of energy generating. Events that are nearly comparable to social and governing structure once thought to only be in literature or Hollywood's interpretation of the Hunger Games.

In addition to being a mother and wife, I am a full-time crop insurance adjuster with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture from Wilmington College. I have lived my entire life as a part of the agricultural community and have raised four children with a deep respect and appreciation for our way of life. My husband has been a District Technician at Highland Soil and Water Conservation District for 20 years. We have always tried to be good stewards to the land. We have dedicated a big portion of our time to educating and volunteering to preserve this land for future generations, so that they can take care of this land and in return this land will take care of them. Having a degree and decades of experience with soils I know that these fields will not be able to be put back into food production for hundreds if not thousands of years. Man can only do so much to fix the soil structure they will have destroyed. Centuries of time will be the only possibility of this land being viable again. According to Harvard Business Review's article, *Global Demand for Food is Rising. Can We Meet It?*, time that our World will not have as our global agriculture production must increase between 59-98% percent from current levels by the year 2050 to meet the food demand the estimated 9.7 billion people will create. These companies are moving in fast and forcefully under the cover of manipulation, misinformation and money before legislation can be made to protect us from this greedy land grab. Now this community is being ripped apart and the land destroyed.

Friends and family have become foes because outsiders with big wallets have convinced members to prostitute their land. As a property owner I understand protecting rights, yet I cannot turn my 4.66 acres into a landfill

because of rules and regulations. A landfill would have a negative effect to my neighbors, community, and environment. Huge solar farms that are pushing into our area in a fast and furious fashion are doing so to get in under the wire before studies can be done and regulations are made. Bureaucracy is failing us. Overriding local agricultural zoning such as the Yellow Wood Project in Jefferson Township is stomping out the voice of the people. Fact is this solar predation has been in the planning for several years, yet we who will be trapped in the aftermath were not informed until it is, or nearly is, a done deal. How is it that all the money being thrown around not a huge red flag? They have contacted our trustees and offered millions of dollars for "Community Projects". That will be merely a band-aid on a huge gaping wound. We will have the best township roads and mowed ditches around for you to drive by and see what happens when big money kills dreams. The solar companies are offering landowners huge sums of money that no one in this area can compete with. And those choice landowners will take their money and move to where they do not have to see the consequences of their actions every single day. The solar companies build their atrocities and those who remain pay for the damage it brings to our property values and environment. How is it that our community cannot get the technology to maintain a strong cell signal, and high-speed internet is not available on my road, but we can have a high-tech solar farm?

This big money is not staying in our community and often not even in our nation. Most of these solar companies and ultimately foreign owned. The solar farms being installed in our neighboring county is being done so by immigrant labor. Even the power produced is going out of state. Everyone benefits except the neighbors are stuck in their devalued homes, looking at an industrial wasteland, waiting to see the full extent of the devastation to the environment. These companies then begin the trading game. They are changing names and selling to other countries. Liability will be buried and untraceable. If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is. We will be the case studies others use to stop this movement. It is easy not to be passionate about something when it's not in your backyard. The big money will not remain in our neighborhood, but the destruction and devastation will. Destroyed ecosystems, shattered families, devalued properties, leaching of cadmium, those will all remain along with many, many other negative effects. For those who have taken a stand against this travesty of solar invasion and have heard our cries, Thank you. As property owners I believe we are subject to reasonable regulations regarding land use. When projects and land use decisions could negatively affect the community, environment, and neighboring landowners, those who could be affected should be given the opportunity to vote on those projects/land uses. We need to develop exclusion zones and encourage farmland preservation. We need legislation now without any grandfathering clauses to protect us and our future generations. We need power restored to our local governments so they may represent their constituents. Thank you for your time and consideration. We need you to support and pass SB52.

Sincerely,

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