

**Ohio House of Representatives
Public Utilities Committee
Written Opponent Testimony
Senate Bill 52**

**Tracy Freeman, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
June 23, 2021**

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Public Utilities Committee, I am Tracy Freeman, Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 52.

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.

I want to begin by thanking the Chair and other members for their diligent and committed efforts working with selected stakeholders to improve the as passed by the Senate version of SB 52. While The Nature Conservancy remains a strong opponent to this bill for reasons I will list briefly, we appreciate the changes made to accommodate a wider range of stakeholders and to attempt to improve the clean energy opportunities in our state. This has been a very arduous process for all of us and we truly appreciate the work you have done to address the significant concerns expressed during previous testimony on this bill and similar measures.

This new regulatory structure and the requirements imposed on clean energy developers is an unnecessary regulatory burden on business which is counterintuitive to the many actions taken by Ohio's lawmakers to reduce regulatory burdens. The restrictive wind setback continues to be a major obstacle for Ohioans who want to lease their private property for wind energy development, especially farmers who offered compelling testimony in opposition to this bill. Many are seeking to diversify their income sources on their land with new windfarm and solar developments, offering them a chance to remain in farming and provide their families with financial security. The construction of windfarms and solar arrays would generate many new job opportunities in the state and, long-term, the presence of these energy sources provides local tax revenue. Indeed, there are areas in Ohio that seek cleaner energy via wind and solar to provide their energy needs and these requirements prevent not only farmers from reaping benefits, but also pit local political subdivisions and residents against each other.

SB 52 creates yet another obstacle for both wind and solar energy development in Ohio by adding steps and hurdles to the siting process all along the way and sends a clear message that Ohio's policy is to create winners and losers by making it even more difficult to site new windfarms or solar arrays in Ohio. This is particularly concerning as this body is likely to pass House Bill 201 which will prevent local communities from taking any action to stop natural gas facilities in their boundaries. This contradicts the momentum in the General Assembly to reduce regulations and streamline permitting to improve our business climate, relieve the regulatory burdens businesses face, and provide for local control. We need a well-balanced, fair approach to our state's energy policies that adds protection for human health and safety while making it possible for new commercial wind and solar to be located in Ohio and fairly compete in the energy market.

Recent polls continue to affirm the results of our July 2017 poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, on the attitudes of registered voters in Ohio toward clean energy. In that poll we interviewed 813 voters. The results showed that a vast majority of Ohio voters support clean energy policies and nearly nine out of ten of those interviewed would tell an elected official to support policies that encourage renewable energy development in Ohio.

When asked specifically about wind and solar energy, 69 percent of voters said more emphasis should be placed on the development on wind energy and 77 percent said the same for solar energy. In addition, 86 percent of voter's advocate creating more reasonable setback limits for the placement of new wind turbines to attract new development to Ohio.

The need for the economic benefits of renewable energy are evident as Ohio farmers experience increasingly tough years with low crop yields due to the increased frequency of rain events or even drought occurrences. As reported by *Energy News* in an article published on October 31, 2019, "Unusually wet weather made it a bad year for many Ohio farmers, but those with wind turbines on their land had a welcome and predictable source of additional income to make up for some of the losses." Not only can farmers harvest the wind during years of low crop yields, but wind turbines can provide additional income during the good years too because farmers can grow crops right up to the base of a wind turbine.

We know that wind and solar siting has become a very controversial issue in Northwest Ohio. All energy sources have pros and cons, and all of them have a footprint and a way of altering the landscape of the area where they are developed. As one committee member in a previous hearing alluded to - neighbors near a fracking facility would love to have these additional restrictions in place. While adding wind turbines or solar arrays to this area might change the landscape, it is important to remember that compared to other energy sources, it is much easier to remove wind turbines and solar arrays from the landscape after they have been decommissioned. In Southeast Ohio, there are numerous abandoned coal mines and plants as well as oil and gas drilling sites that have changed the landscape and created many safety issues that local communities and the state end up having to fund and manage. We continually hear that comparing wind and solar to other forms of energy is an apples and oranges proposition.

That is simply not true when you consider the impact that other energy generation sources have on esthetics, seismic activity, groundwater, surface water, animal habitat, the environment and more. Farmers can plant crops up to and underneath wind turbines, and solar arrays can provide pollinator habitat in and around their footprint.

Instead of passing this bill that will create a statewide policy to address a local matter, we suggest that the bill's provisions that seat local representatives on the Ohio Power Siting Board be the extent of the changes and that all energy source siting allow this option. We support local citizen participation on review/siting boards so that those most affected by these projects have a seat at the table. It is important that people have their voice heard on all energy siting issues, including oil, natural gas, nuclear, hydropower and coal facilities, not just those that relate to wind and solar development.

We are a science-based organization. The science is clear that a lower-carbon future is critical to address climate change. Achieving this goal benefits all Ohioans. Existing businesses such as General Motors, Honda of America, Land O'Lakes, Walmart, Michelin, Adidas, Bank of American, Proctor & Gamble, Dow, and Ford and so many more accept that science and have ambitious goals to do so. Newer businesses such as Facebook, Google and Amazon actively seek states who support and even incentivize clean energy for facility locations and typically require renewable sources for their energy needs. Cities are setting goals to provide renewable energy for their customers in response to demand and as costs are increasingly competitive and reasonable. This energy can either be generated in Ohio, where we benefit from the investment, jobs and tax revenue or it can come from neighboring states and Ohioans lose.

For these reasons, The Nature Conservancy opposes SB 52 as it is unnecessary to protect health and the environment, moves our state backwards while other surrounding states are moving forward to embrace all forms of renewable and low carbon sources of power, and hurts business growth. We should be looking for opportunities to grow the clean energy sector in Ohio instead of passing bills that will put the 114,000 Ohioans who work in the clean energy sector at risk. Additionally, we believe we will lose the investments in our state by passing another bill creating more regulatory hurdles for business growth, reduce the opportunities to site cleaner sources of power in Ohio, and lose another opportunity to develop a comprehensive energy plan that creates a fair playing field for all sources of energy.

We have testified many times to the need for a true comprehensive energy plan that 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. It is unfortunate that Ohio addresses our energy portfolio in pieces and clearly creates winners and losers. We need a well-balanced approach that allows local input, protects human health and safety and our natural environment, and responds to the very real changes and demands from national and global businesses embracing clean energy. Ohio has long been known as a state that can offer ample resources to anyone who chooses to come within our borders. We have so much to offer – ample water and land resources, an educated and willing work force, excellent



educational opportunities, beautiful local and state parks and preserves and much more. Let's allow local voices to be heard by including additional voices during the Power Siting Board process and remove the additional restrictive burdens contained in Senate Bill 52.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 52. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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