

June 24, 2021  
House Public Utilities Committee  
Opponent Testimony – Am. Sub. S.B. 52  
Andrew Chappell-Dick, Bluffton

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to share my perspective on the impacts of Amended Substitute SB52. And I'd also like to say thank you for facilitating a reasonable dialogue on these issues.

My name is Andy Chappell-Dick of Bluffton. I appear here today as a representative of Allen-Auglaize Coalition for Responsible Energy, ACRE, and I am speaking on behalf of a wide variety of citizens in our two counties. I'm a constituent of both President of the Senate Huffman and Speaker of the House Cupp, and a major project affected by this bill, Birch Solar, is proposed in their—my--districts. This bill will have an immediate impact on the viability of this project. Despite the characterizations of some proponents of this bill, there are many neighbors of the project and residents of my county who feel positive about the prospects of Birch Solar. ACRE is in no way affiliated with the investing company and receives no outside support; our enthusiasm emerges from examining the benefits it brings to our community, and the resiliency it adds to Ohio's energy future.

We have followed the existing regulatory process for siting and approving new energy generation as it has been applied to our local project. It strikes us as robust, exhaustive, and eminently fair. Trustees, commissioners, and other officials WERE informed of the project last year; that some local citizens felt broadsided may be more an indictment of their civic engagement. For this reason, ACRE was founded this spring primarily to promote a reasoned local dialog about the project and press the company to ensure the best possible outcomes for our community.

This bill requires preemptive county-level designation of Energy Development Districts, as well as additional local representation on the Ohio Power Siting Board, but for wind and solar projects only. In the pantheon of energy industry development, why does the state single out the renewable energy sector as the

one that is in need of these extra steps? I will grant you that wind turbines are tall and imposing. I will grant you that solar farms are short and ... spread out. But the sponsors of this bill argue that somehow these represent an industry and an infrastructure more offensive and detrimental to local communities than any other, so much more so that they deserve state legislation to pre-emptively limit their insertion into our communities.

In fact, it was only seven years ago that the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation that prohibited localities from banning fracking in their areas. Now, we see an about face to empower localities to stop wind and solar. At the time we were counselled that state energy policy was too important to leave to local officials. But the bill before us today reveals anew that certain sectors are favored over others. This puts the state on an anti-competitive footing; short-changes Ohio's energy ratepayers who are directly impacted by our grid's modernity; and overall is retrograde for Ohio's economic future. Distorting free markets—picking winners and losers—is something I did not expect from this General Assembly and I cannot understand why such a thing would be considered.

Back to my local picture. Last fall, the Shawnee Township Trustees passed a resolution opposing the Birch Solar project. The passage of this resolution was swift and followed an evening of unanswered questions being raised by some residents. Despite two known, upcoming public meetings where the company would be in town to answer these questions and provide details of their proposed plans, they passed the resolution anyway. They did not wait to have their questions answered, they did not wait to hear from local residents who may support the project, they did not conduct any analysis on the pros and cons of the project, they simply decided to oppose the project. For these reasons, some local residents attended last week's Trustee meeting to ask them to rescind that resolution. During this meeting, one Trustee stated on the record that the Birch Solar project would have "no local economic impact" because the electricity was being purchased exclusively by an outside industrial customer. This reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of how Ohio's deregulated electricity markets work, and flatly ignores the tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue and the income accruing to local leaseholders. However, just the fact that an officeholder could make such an absurd statement underscores the precarious nature of these discussions at the local level.

SB 52 will propagate this political nightmare at the local level and will pit neighbor against neighbor and who can possibly think that is good for the state? Avoiding the emotion and misinformation that can spread around large energy development projects at the local level is precisely why a state process was established. These projects must be evaluated on their merits, and the OPSB is the proper venue for doing this. It is incumbent upon the State Legislature to debate and set energy policy for the common good—SB 52 shirks that burden.

When a project like Birch Solar is proposed, it represents a generational opportunity to improve our schools, improve our local financial situation, create meaningful construction work for our local laborers and so many other benefits. Projects such as this deserve careful consideration. We don't want to jeopardize millions of dollars for schools and local governments by subjecting these critical developments to emotional, baseless claims in opposition.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions.