

Representative Juanita Brent
The Ohio House of Representatives

House Public Utilities Committee

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Energy Jobs and Justice Act: A Comprehensive, Equitable Energy Plan for Ohio

Thank you Representative Weinstein for your remarks and for your leadership.

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Public Utilities Committee: thank you all for this opportunity to testify today on House Bill 429—The Energy Jobs & Justice Act. This is the first comprehensive energy policy proposed in Ohio since Ohio SB 221, 14 years ago, which created the Renewable Portfolio Standard and Energy Efficiency Standards. This bill moves Ohio forward, creating opportunities for ALL communities, including communities of color who have typically been left behind in the energy policy of this state.

The Energy Jobs and Justice Act has three main pillars: equity, carbon emissions reductions, and transparency and accountability. By focusing on these three core components, the bill ensures that Ohio finally has clean energy policy that reduces carbon emissions, facilitates job growth, and confronts historical injustices and harms aimed Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color across the state.

Ohioans have the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment. Our communities deserve fresh air to breathe, clean water to drink, and access to renewable energy options that help us all fight climate change, while saving money on our bills.

The clean energy transformation is here. Across the country, jobs are being created in the clean energy and energy efficiency industry. In Ohio, we already have over 103,000 of our neighbors and friends working in the clean energy sector. **It's time we remove market barriers and allow ALL Ohioans to benefit from the booming clean energy market.**

Importantly, this bill addresses racial inequity in the clean energy transition by **creating new infrastructure for people of color to run businesses and have jobs in the clean energy space**. The Energy Jobs and Justice Act allows for investments in workforce development and contractor equity, which will attract billions in new private workforce investment in Ohio and creating family-sustaining jobs to BIPOC communities through innovation. These are holistic programs that ensure there is childcare available for working parents, transportation to ensure they can get to and from trainings, and provides preparation for clean energy industry jobs.

The Act will establish at least **15 Clean Energy Incubators** across the State to host Ohio Clean Energy Workforce Programs and Clean Jobs & Environmental Justice Business Accelerator Programs to help ensure BIPOC-led projects are well supported. The **Ohio Clean Energy Workforce Programs** will offer a **Clean Jobs Training Program** that prioritizes BIPOC communities, individuals aging out of foster care, environmental justice communities, communities with low income, and reentering citizens. It will also launch the **Ohio Jumpstart Clean Jobs Training program**, ensuring a path forward for incarcerated Ohioans to ensure they have skills and opportunities when they reenter the workforce.

Solar installers and wind technicians are two of the fastest growing jobs in the country, and we have the opportunity to harness that potential to ensure an equitable clean energy future for all Ohioans. **The Clean Jobs & Environmental Justice Business Accelerator Programs** will support new BIPOC-led businesses related to clean energy and provide mentoring, personalized coaching sessions, business plan development, low or no cost loans, grant funds, and more for existing BIPOC contractor businesses.

The Act also addresses issues we will see across the state as power plants shut down and ensures a clean energy transition for Ohio's Appalachian communities, those most directly impacted by pollution, and those previously dependent upon fossil fuels. This is very important, especially as we hear more and more of coal plants closing due to market forces, like the Kyger Creek power plant in Eastern Ohio. The **Community Transition Closure Fund** will ensure communities aren't left hurting after companies pack up and leave, and will invest and direct resources to facilitate a just transition away from legacy energy sources to a clean energy future.

In addition, the Energy Jobs and Justice Act will **create the Governor's Office of Energy Justice (OEJ) – which would serve as the leading voice on energy justice matters before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO)**. For years, Ohioans have suffered from the complicated energy and electricity processes that claim to serve Ohio customers. Ohio needs additional safeguards against massive rate increases, protecting Ohioans who are already economically vulnerable. The OEJ will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of energy justice principles in the PUCO's work and other agencies statewide. This Office will be key in ensuring Ohio has statewide energy policy that is equitable, transparent, and accountable to the people. In order to change the dynamics and ensure Ohio's electricity markets are working for all Ohioans, the *transparency and accountability pillar* of the bill contains fixes to make the energy and electricity sphere more transparent and holds utilities accountable.

As we move away from legacy energy resources, we must quickly implement clean energy strategies that will allow ALL Ohioans to reap the benefits of clean energy job growth and development. Ohio's energy policy needs to ensure we're ahead of the game, not left behind. Ohioans are ready for a diversified approach that ensures reliability, keeps costs reasonable, invites new jobs and development, and reduces pollution in our air. The Energy Jobs and Justice Act is a bold pathway forward for Ohio energy policy and an opportunity to facilitate a just transition to a clean energy future.