

**Testimony of Kimberly Groth**  
**Seneca County, Ohio**  
**In support of SB-52**  
**Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee**  
**March 9, 2021**

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, ranking member Williams, members of the committee, I write as a proponent of SB-52.

In March of 2018 my husband and I learned that our home was in the footprint of the proposed Seneca Wind Project. It now appears our home is also in the footprint of a second project called Honey Creek Wind which has not yet filed with the Ohio Power Siting Board. Local opposition to these projects has been overwhelming. Consider the following: sign-in sheets at local public hearings hosted by the Ohio Power Siting Board showed 90% opposition to the Republic Wind Project and 95% opposition to the Seneca Wind Project.

In the words of David Zak, President & CEO of the Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership, "It is accurate to say that the County, the majority of the townships involved, the largest school district recipient, and the park district have judged [industrial wind] not in the public interest." Seneca County Commissioners have vowed to "oppose any proposed wind turbine projects to the maximum extent allowed by law."

But all of that currently means nothing. The projects that are moving forward in Seneca and other counties answer only to the Ohio Power Siting Board, and the position of local government and weight of public opinion are not factors considered by that board. This is why a local referendum on these projects is so necessary.

Local control is not a new idea in this discussion. The related issues of alternative energy zone status and county-level control of whether to grant payment in lieu of taxes were intended as means to accept or reject industrial wind projects at a county level. State Senator Matt Dolan stated in 2017 that through the AEZ/PILOT, "The locals will have the ability to decide what is in the best interest of their community. The benefits and burdens, just like any industry, have been and will continue to be debated at the local level."

(<http://www.ohiosenate.gov/senators/dolan/news/dolan-introduces-wind-energy-bill-to-promote-economic-growth>)

Although time has shown that the AEZ and PILOT are no longer effective as that vehicle of local control, it remains absolutely necessary and appropriate that local communities do have a voice in these projects. There are multiple reasons why a township referendum is the appropriate route for that local control, but I will focus on just two.

First, industrial wind simply requires more land than other types of energy generation. For example, a natural gas power plant covers an average of 30 acres (<https://www.strata.org/pdf/2017/footprints-full.pdf>) while the Seneca Wind Project would cover over 25,000 acres (and that is only one of multiple projects proposed in this area). And while the 30 acre natural gas plant is self contained, the 25,000 acre wind project is imposed over a residential community.

Second, it is my hope that a referendum would motivate developers to be better corporate citizens to the communities asked to host projects. Developers enter the community saying they want to be a good neighbor and community partner. But pretty words aside, what we have seen in Seneca County is that developers treat the community with an iron fist. We've had a developer sue more than 30 local landowners, forcing them to remain in expired leases against their will. We've had developers disregard concerns about turbines being placed in close proximity to schools, and ignore requests for a buffer from local parks and nature preserves. In fact, Apex Clean Energy employed their legal team to prohibit the Seneca County Park District's Executive Director from testifying before the Ohio Power Siting Board.

Developers are getting away with all of this because under the current system they can. They simply do not need local consent for their projects. I included a quote from Senator Matt Dolan earlier about communities weighing the "benefits and burdens" of industrial wind. Communities can currently weigh the sides to exhaustion, but without recourse to local voters the reality is developers in Ohio have no motivation to seek out those communities that would welcome the benefits of industrial wind, or to make their projects more palatable by lessening the burdens of their projects on those communities that are hesitant.

In closing, I am proud to call Seneca County home. I know there are deep pocketed corporations and lobbyist groups opposing this bill. Meanwhile, the residents who will be most impacted spend our own money hosting spaghetti dinners and hog raffles to continue our fight in a system that is built to exclude us. What is happening in Seneca County is grassroots, it is strong and it is not going away. I am grateful to the sponsors of this bill and pray that its passage will return a local voice to the siting of industrial wind and solar projects.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Groth  
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