

Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee  
Senate Bill 52  
Opposition Testimony  
March 23, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, and Ranking Member Williams, thank you for the opportunity to submit opposition testimony on Senate Bill 52. My name is Betty Halberstadt. I have the fortunate distinction of being a landowner in a utility-scale solar project in Ohio, and someone who has worked in the clean energy industry for the past 14 years in 16 different states.

In my job, I am able to talk to farmers directly and better understand their needs for their land and estate planning. Many farmers continue to farm. The lease payments offer opportunities to invest in their farm and offer stability in challenging times. It allows farmers to keep their land in the family versus selling off to large Agricultural conglomerates, while providing a more comfortable retirement. Lease payments can also provide solutions to unexpected, and out of the ordinary family needs. A couple of examples would be the farmer who just recovered from cancer and was planning on retiring and renting his land to a neighboring farmer. His energy lease payments were to be ten times what farm rents would be! That ensured the future for he and his wife, regardless of whether or not his cancer might return. And his younger farming neighbor whose youngest child has severe autism, who would require lifetime care. He was farming significant acreage and working two part time jobs to try and build a nest egg for their sons' long-term care once he and his wife were no longer on this earth. He thought his opportunity to participate in the energy farm was a godsend. He no longer had to work himself to the bone and was able to scale back and spend more time with his family.

From the time landowners are approached to be a part of a project, to the time that a project goes into construction, takes years. Farmers and companies work together in a partnership to make sure everyone's interests are fairly represented.

I believe that Senate Bill 52 and House Bill 118 would unfairly tip the balance of decisions that should be between a landowner and a company, to outside parties that do not have interest in these decisions. After talking with several hundred farmers and landowners, I have found there are two main reasons for opposition to an energy generating farm: one, people who live near projects don't want to look at the infrastructure; and secondly, they are not personally included in receiving what is sometimes large sums of money. After years of planning, signing contracts, and moving forward with a project—that a township could referendum and upend these decisions is unfair and not in the best interests of Ohio farmers. Counties also benefit tremendously from taxes paid on the energy project, thereby minimizing real estate tax increases for all county residents. For the sake of landowner rights (right to farm) and moving good projects into rural communities (no industrial smokestacks or polluting facilities), I request this committee does not move this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for your consideration.