

Senate Energy & 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 and House Bill 118. My name is Jeff Heyob. I grew up on the farm that my brother currently lives on in Highland County that is involved in a solar project known as Willowbrook.

I was born on my grand-parents farm in Harrison Ohio and grew up helping raise chickens and milking cows. In 1968 we moved to Highland County and continued milking cows 45 more years until 2013. I assisted my family with the daily farm operations alongside my brother. We were involved in 4-H, with my mother being a 4-H advisor. Now, my brother and I share ownership of our farm where we grow corn and beans.

I graduated in 1991 with a Master's degree in electrical engineering from U. of Cincinnati and started my own software engineering company. That business helped support military turbine engine life extension. I am now a contractor with the Wright Patterson Airforce base. Because of this, I live in Beavercreek. My brother Alan has remained the care-taker of our farm and we have been fortunate.

Although it is his passion, my brother cannot farm this land by himself forever. My three sons, all adults in other career directions, are in support of the addition of a solar farm in order to create a stable income for my brother and a chance to keep this land in our family.

The Ohio Power Siting Board are professionals who can objectively research and look at a project as it would benefit the community. Senate Bill 52 takes away this power of objectivity in solar projects and politicizes it by giving it to a subjective voice. This is my land to decide what to do with, and the Ohio Power Siting Board is a group of well-informed individuals who we should trust with the judgement of projects such as these.

This solar project combines my passion of engineering and building with my lifelong admiration of this farm. Just like any construction project, it will look bad before it looks good. However, what is more important than this project looking bad or good is the benefits it will reap for the community for years to come.

The PILOT program will ensure that this project supports the surrounding community as well. Training and equipment to local fire and emergency departments will be given, in addition to road use agreements. The solar program will be advantageous to the surrounding wildlife. Solar is similar to the Conservation Reserve Program, but the federal government does not have to pay for this land to be conserved. Solar projects are a way to ensure the land is staying conserved without having to pay federal money.

Another benefit to solar energy projects such as this one is the decommissioning process that will happen at the end of the project's useful life, all of the materials used will be disposed of in a sustainable way such as recycling. The land will actually be in better shape than it was before the project.

I will admit, I was new to solar when approached about the project. I was hesitant, but after doing research about all of the benefits that solar is able to provide for myself, my brother, and Highland County, I chose to move forward with the project. Watching the Hillcrest project under construction and all of the good that came out of it for the community solidified my decision and motivated me to put more land into the Willowbrook project.

This project will be transformational for Highland and Brown Counties. The company building this solar farm will make payments to local communities, and my land will be directly supporting local schools. These solar projects are a key piece to economic development of a community moving forward. The business of farming is dynamic, and solar is a good way to ensure the land can be used for the benefit of the community for years to come.

This solar project will be a great education opportunity for the community as well. I have already been active in STEM education and in retirement, I would like to bring students to tour the solar farm to educate them on the process of solar farming and all of its benefits. This would be greatly beneficial to local community STEM education with first-hand presentation to students.

I want to thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. I hope that I have shown you only some of the multitude of ways solar energy benefits a community, and that you will consider opposing Senate Bill 52 and House Bill 118 for these very reasons.