

March 23, 2021

Ohio Senate  
Energy and Public Utilities Committee  
1 E Capital St.  
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mark Walter, Director of Legislative & Regulatory Affairs for Savion, LLC. Savion is a utility-scale solar and energy storage development company based out of Kansas City, Missouri and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Macquarie Green Investment Group. We are actively developing in 28 states with a portfolio of 14,000 megawatts (MWs) of solar and storage worth over \$16 billion in capital investment. In Ohio, we have an active portfolio of over 700 MWs worth approximately \$825 million should the projects get the chance to build.

As a company with two projects that have received full permits from the Ohio Power Siting Board, Atlanta Farms in Pickaway County and Madison Fields in Madison County, Savion is positioned to speak from experience about the impacts that SB 52 would have on solar development in the Ohio. Without question, this legislation would decimate utility-scale solar development and all but ensure Ohio loses dozens of solar projects and the associated tax dollars and jobs that come with them.

Savion understands how important it is to establish strong, trusted relationships in the communities where we are developing, which is why our company prioritizes reaching out to locals early and often to provide accurate information on the work we are doing. We try to get as much feedback possible from the people who will live near these facilities so we can incorporate those thoughts into our final design. Savion truly wants local buy-in before approaching the OPSB for a permit.

To that end, we do everything we can – from hosting local meetings with both supporters and opponents, listening to their feedback, to purchasing rooftop solar arrays for non-participating landowners near the project – all to ensure county and township residents are well aware of the process and have a say in how it comes together. We refer to this as “social licensing,” and we take it as seriously as the OPSB permitting process.

After listening to supporter testimony for the legislation on March 9<sup>th</sup>, there are a few misconceptions I would like to clarify for the committee:

- **The current OPSB process is one of the most thorough permitting processes in the nation and strongly prioritizes local opinions when considering permit applications.**
  - For an understanding of the robust applications that the industry files, I strongly encourage you to look at Savion’s applications for Atlanta Farms (Case No. 19-1880-EL-BGN) and Madison Fields (Case No. 19-1881-EL-BGN), both of which are over a thousand pages long and include a



depth of detail on issues like how we will deal with drain tiles, lining the project with trees and shrubs to minimize visual impact, and our plan to address any issues that arise for those in the communities during construction and operation.

- Local constituents are encouraged to formally voice their opinion on the project and those comments are visible in the case records noted above. The OPSB staff and Commissioners read those comments and hold us accountable for acting to ensure they are addressed.
- Additionally, the OPSB rules require that the project developers meet with the community *at least* 90 days prior to filing an application. Notifications for those meetings *must* be advertised to the locals through newspapers, website ads, and home mailings.
- **Solar projects are not a risk to nearby farms and effectively navigate impact to drain tiles with the landowner.**
  - Our projects perform multiple in-depth studies on topography, geology, wildlife, and runoff. These studies are part of our OPSB application and can be seen in the Atlanta Farms and Madison Fields filings. Savion commits considerable time and money to ensuring that any facility mitigates damage to drain tile and plans repair when necessary (which is also critical to ensuring the best conditions for the solar field). The OPSB rules clearly point out that water impacts must be considered and adequately addressed prior to the granting of a permit. Any notion that a solar project (or any project going through the OPSB) will result in drainage or other major negative impacts to surrounding properties is not accurate.
- **Savion's solar leases do not contain non-disclosure agreements and our leases are a matter of public record.**
  - There were several proponents of SB 52 who stated that renewable lease holders are prevented from discussing that they entered into an agreement with a developer. This is part of a larger narrative that renewable developers "sneak" into communities and file permits before anyone is aware of their presence. This simply could not be further from the truth. In reality, our leases do not contain non-disclosure agreements or any type of "gag order." We also file our leases with the authorities having jurisdiction, making them public record often years before our project is ready for to apply for a permit. Add on top of that the local meetings prior to filing (including the OPSB pre-application meetings which require advertisement) and any notion of developers moving in without community knowledge or consent is easily dispelled.

While there were many more misleading statements made during the proponent testimony that are worth addressing, I want to instead take time to point out the many positive impacts our projects have on local communities.

- **Taxes** - The vast majority of solar projects in Ohio are located in rural communities and will be among the largest taxpayers in the taxing district once they are operational. Atlanta Farms and Madison Fields, for example, will be paying over \$1M annually to each of their respective counties through Ohio's Payment in Lieu of Tax Agreement (PILOT) legislation.
- **Jobs** – In addition to the tax considerations, the Ohio PILOT *requires* that our projects hire at least 80% of our construction workers from Ohio. Each of our projects will employ somewhere between 200-500 workers, each for the better part of a year, most of them Ohioans. Then, once the construction is



completed, our projects require relatively few people, which means that, unlike basically any other development paying that amount in taxes annually, they do not fundamentally change the social fabric of a community nor do they strain local services or require local residential housing which is in shortage for most developing areas across the nation.

- **Landowner Payments** – Traditional agricultural roots are being strengthened by allowing farmers to effectively diversify their crops. Our projects only work by finding landowners who are interested in voluntarily leasing their land. Solar leases often bring in 2-4x the revenue that traditional agriculture would bring these landowners. The reality is that our projects are bringing wealth and security that traditional agriculture hasn't been able to provide and actually allowing landowners to keep land in the family farm they've owned for generations. Implementing solar does NOT transition the land from the ability to house farming operations unlike selling off house lots or selling for other types of permanent development.
- **Associated Benefits** – Savion, in particular, works to support the entire community where we develop. Whether it's providing rooftop solar panels to local non-participating landowners, supporting schools with new taxes, or just supporting the community in general (e.g. sponsoring local fairs), we truly, honestly care about the communities where we are doing the work. We want them to be better off than before we arrived and we take great care to enable that outcome. This is not only the right thing to do, but it's good business: When other counties hear how we worked with Pickaway County, we hope they will view us as a welcome resident also.

The timing, cost, and double-jeopardy that SB 52 creates for solar development in Ohio would prevent all of these benefits from coming to the state. The amount of risk that this legislation brings to an already risky industry would make it nearly impossible to raise the capital necessary to continue development. While we are open to working with locals, legislators, and regulators to improve the current OPSB process, we strongly urge you to reconsider this solution, which is particularly challenging for our industry.

I appreciate your time and ask that the Committee vote "No" on SB 52.

Sincerely,



Mark Walter

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