

Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Opposition Testimony
Senate Bill 52
Connie Schoultheis

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to provide testimony on Senate Bill 52. My name is Connie Schoultheis and I am a lifelong citizen of Highland county, where I have resided on my farm in Highland for 35 years.

I am in opposition to Senate Bill 52 because it gives complete control of my property rights to my neighbors.

We milk 75 cows with our son and we have three daughters who work off of the farm. All of our kids are supportive in moving forward with solar energy on our land.

Farming is unpredictable, hard work. For us, solar is our way of retirement. At some point in our lives, we would like to retire from operating a dairy farm and all of the grueling work that goes into it. We made a dairy farm 35 years ago and no one voted on that. Are you going to vote on what I plant? I think it is dangerous to demand a farmer do or don't do certain things on our land.

In 2016, we were approached by Open Road Renewables about the Willowbrook solar project, and we decided to look into it. This was not an easy decision for us, as we have dedicated our lives to our farm, but after the research necessary to educate ourselves on the benefits of solar for not only our family, but the surrounding community, we decided it was the correct decision. We worked with Open Road Renewables every step of this process in ensuring this is beneficial to every citizen of Highland county.

We have put half of our acres into this project, and if we did not wholeheartedly believe that this project would benefit us and the surrounding community, we would not have taken such a big step.

I like to say, we have always worked the ground, and now the ground is going to work for us.

Senate Bill 52 is unfair because it penalizes the farmer. We pay the mortgage, insurance, and taxes on our farm land. This is our land to do with what we please. I support private property rights, and if you do as well then you should be against Senate Bill 52.

Many in support of Senate Bill 52 say that solar and wind power are disruptive. Solar panels are quiet, peaceful neighbors. They are low laying, and actually give back to the soil as they will be in a conservation under solar. In fact, when the solar panels are removed in 30 years, the ground will be in better shape to farm than it was previously.

If Ohio does not embrace clean energy, it will miss a pivotal opportunity. The sun provides us with free energy, and all we need to do is build the tools to harness it for our communities. There is only so much coal in the ground, and we need to look to the future. We have an opportunity to displace carbon emissions and build a better community using local land, why would we not take it?

In addition to the benefits we see as landowners, this project will significantly benefit the surrounding communities and schools, which desperately need additional revenue. The only way to get money for the schools is to tax property owners—that's us!

There is no industry that has a local referendum process like the one created in SB 52.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. I hope you will understand that Senate Bill 52 is detrimental to private property rights, and that solar energy is beneficial to our farm and our community.