

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ms. Ranking Member and all the distinguished members of the committee for listening to my testimony.

My name is Margaret Branstrator and I am a retired college science instructor and environmental activist living in Oxford. I lived in Richmond Indiana from 1975-2000 and helped write the first aquifer protection zoning ordinance - which is still in use.

I am writing to oppose the recently revised version of Senate Bill 52. The previous version was criticized for being an "investment killer" but this version has the same problem. Neither version seems to have included adequate discussion and consideration of the consequences of the proposal.

Having lived for 15 years in rural Preble County before moving to Oxford, I can see immense difficulties in designating useable energy development districts at the township level. Granting township trustees veto power over decisions by OPSB would discourage investors as much as the previous version of the bill.

Utility-level solar developments require large contiguous areas of relatively level land. These would generally involve more than one township to be viable. The 900 acre Angelina Project ½ mile from our former Preble County home, involves 2 townships. Coordinating viable energy development districts between multiple townships would cause chaos for investors.

The excessive set-back requirements for utility-scale wind projects passed as part of the 2014 budget bill (the strictest set-backs of any state) continues to limit large wind projects in Ohio. It is unlikely that any township could set aside an adequate area for large-scale wind development under these set-backs requirements.

Furthermore, the expertise to make useful site determinations is not likely to exist at the township level. Siting wind and solar is complex. Misinformation about wind and solar from competing interests is widespread and state regulatory boards have access to more complete knowledge than local citizens. That's why PUCO and OPSB were set up in the first place.

It seems to me that the hidden agenda here is the same as that behind earlier versions of HB52, and the scandal-ridden HB 6 from 2 years ago: Limiting wind and solar expansion in Ohio to protect fossil-fuel utilities from competition. But renewables are cheaper and cleaner than fossil-fuels and will replace them eventually no matter how many laws you pass. Wouldn't it be better to try to smooth the transition and spend our time and taxes retraining displaced workers for the jobs of the future? Wind turbine mechanics are predicted to be one of the top 5 high-demand jobs in the next 10 years.

This is not to say that local concerns about wind and solar projects should be ignored! Not at all! But the best way to address local concerns may be to hold informational meetings in affected communities. I believe this is already required. Maybe we just need more of them at more convenient times and places.

In conclusion, I recommend going back to the drawing board to come up with a better solution than SB 52. If you are really serious about increasing local control, you should level the playing field and include ALL energy projects – including both fossil fuel AND renewable. Then you should also cancel SB 127 since it prevents local control for natural gas.