

SENATE ENERGY PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE
JEREMY J. KITSON PROPONENT TESTIMONY
Am. Sub. Senate Bill 52
May 25.2021

Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee, my name is Jeremy Kitson and I am a rural resident of Harrison Township in Van Wert County, home to the largest industrial scale wind project in the State of Ohio and a soon to be developed 46 megawatt industrial solar array. Out of great respect for your time, and the abundance of interest my family and many others in rural Van Wert, County, have with this bill, I will only focus on a few key concerns.

For years, rural citizens of Ohio like myself have been engaged to restore meaningful local control avenues when it comes to siting utility scale wind and solar projects. This has been a long and arduous journey. We strongly feel that the state system is broken when it comes to having our concerns fully heard and mitigated. We feel strongly that the OPSB and PUCO have started to listen to our pleas for balance. I thank the legislators and members of both boards for finally hearing us on this issue.

While we are strongly disappointed that our voices seem to create problems for business interests from a township level, we are willing to compromise based on the new language of this bill. It's been long said in politics that if both sides are happy and upset simultaneously, the legislation is most likely fair for all parties. I want it on the record that I am certainly not against progress, and I am absolutely for private property rights. But property rights must be equitable for leaseholders and non-lease holders alike. We all have a proverbial skin in the game when it comes to the future of our communities. If a leaseholder can negatively impact my quality of life and create significant uncertainty in the capital of my home, why would I not deserve a voice in the process? I don't fundamentally understand why legislators and business groups believe that one side has more rights than another.

Zoning and land use plans exist for a reason. They exist so incompatible land uses can be resolved and we can decide the fate of our communities in which we are born and largely stay. I left Ohio to pursue my college baseball dream and lived in Florida for over 17 years. Thankfully, I was given an opportunity to return and build on our small family farm that we have owned since the 1950's. My Grandfather and Father worked our very ground, so I understand the hard work and property rights of my farming neighbors. I am blessed and thankful that I was given an opportunity to come home and build on our farm. I am blessed that my wife and I can raise our three great kids the way I was raised to care for the land, our neighbors, our extended community, and all of rural Ohioans. But I also know that when you are zoned agricultural/residential, there is legitimacy to strongly state that industrial wind and solar are just that, industrial. Whether current Ohio Revised Code defines them properly or not, the fact is, they are industrial power plants that can be given a pass to be zoned into areas that are not designated as such. That, my community largely has a problem with. To say that we have been ignored would be an understatement. This bill allows a compromise which we feel we can live with. We just want more transparency with developers up front and a more vital and meaningful say about development in our community. I trust my county commissioners will do the right thing and give the people a true voice in this process. I trust they will work with our township boards and residents, as well as the developers, to resolve any conflicts that may arise.

In the end, I just want to live out the rest of my days in beautiful rural Ohio. Agricultural nuisances don't bother me, you know and accept that will occur when you choose to live rurally. In fact, I have a hog farm one mile North, and a large dairy operation one mile South. I would never logically complain about or prevent that type of development. We need farms to feed our world. I also think we need a better Earth, and if wind and solar are contributors to a better Earth, we can find compromise as to where they would best be sited. I fail to see why taking prime farm ground out of production for decades wouldn't create a devastating effect on rural economies and deny our people something we all rely on, our great farmers to produce food. I am here to pledge my support for this compromise on behalf of many rural Van Wert County residents, this is something we do not love, but it is something we can live with. Thank you for your time and I would be glad to answer any questions the committee may have.

Jeremy J. Kitson
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