

SENATE ENERGY & PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE

JULIA F. JOHNSON 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 Julie Johnson and I reside in rural Champaign County. I have been testifying on this issue with other members of the public for more than a decade. It is our great hope that you will move forward to pass this legislation as soon as possible. Given the enormous pipeline of utility scale projects at PJM, this is a matter of great urgency for us.

We understand the current version of SB 52 represents a compromise with corporate interests and seeks to balance those interests with that of the community. We have argued in favor of local representation at the township level but reluctantly will accept county-level representation if that is all you are willing to do. If we find there might be tweaks to improve the balance between those corporate interests and the community, we will speak to those in the House.

It is unacceptable that the issue of siting massive renewable energy facilities has become so contentious. The corporate community and the people of Ohio should share common interests. Alexis De Tocqueville wrote of “the intersection of self-interest rightly understood” in Democracy in America. He makes the case that government can work when we seek to recognize those shared interests. Surely there is a point at which we can come together.

It was heartening to read of JP Morgan’s recent commitment to build solar canopies in its parking lot at Polaris. We applaud Whirlpool and Ball for building their wind turbines on company land to supply their on-site energy needs. We support initiatives to reclaim brownfields and former coal mines to site industrial-scale wind and solar.

But the protection of prime farmland and sensitive natural resources, habitat and biodiversity is important as well. Potentially negative impacts on businesses integral to our local farm economy should be recognized, too. This ought not be an “either or” choice. More thoughtfully considering the best balance of interests is a local matter and one which the Ohio Power Siting Board should support. One size does not fit all and the current process fails to weigh competing interests in a thoughtful way.

Forcing unwanted projects on helpless communities will only worsen the already contentious relationship between developers and in the long run will not serve the interests of Ohioans. Studies such as the Princeton Net Zero Study and others make it clear that a local voice is essential to implementing the nation’s energy policies. SB 52 is a step in that direction and it is long overdue.

We ask that you act on this bill today. You have heard all the arguments and there is nothing more to add to the conversation. We appreciate the efforts of the sponsors to find a compromise we can live with.