

STARK COUNTY ENGINEER

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To: **Honorable Stephanie Kunze – Chair**
Honorable William Reineke – Vice-Chair
Honorable Nickie Antonio – Ranking Minority Member
Transportation Committee Members

Re: **Sub HB 74, Transportation Budget**
Force Account Limits Increase – SUPPORT

I am Keith Bennett. As Stark County Engineer I strongly support the proposed increases to the force account limits. Stark County has both significant urban areas with multi-lane roads as well as large rural areas and many miles of 2-lane rural roadways. We complete a significant number of roadway and bridge/culvert projects every year to maintain and improve the transportation system in Stark County. Our projects range from small culvert/bridge rehab/replacement projects to multi-million dollar roadway widenings, intersection improvements, and large bridge replacements. Our County has always used a balanced approach using both force account and construction bidding to deliver our annual program. The majority of our construction dollars are used on traditional contractor bid methods utilizing federal and state infrastructure funding. However, force account work has always been an important tool in delivering projects, especially in the rural areas of the county. It has become more difficult to complete the types of force account projects that our work forces are more than capable of completing due to the fact the limits on force account have not been revised since 2003. We strongly request that the limits be raised as proposed in this bill for the following reasons:

- Material and labor costs have increased significantly since 2003. Asphalt materials have increased three fold and concrete item at least two fold in that period. Labor rates have also increased over 40 percent in the same time frame. We have reduced our staff by over 30% over this same period with no intentions of increasing our forces.
- It's becoming more difficult to do "mid-range" projects since they can not be completed by our employees under current force account limits. These projects are typically not profitable enough for contractors to bid the work.
- For smaller projects under \$300,000, our workforce can produce the most cost effective solution and best quality work for the dollars spent. We can complete these projects more efficiently and at a savings to the taxpayers.
- We have better control over completion schedules for these smaller road and bridge/culvert projects.

- Force account works allow us to keep our government union workers employed and productive during construction season.
- We continually have work and projects that utilize contractors to build our intermediate and larger size projects while our workforce concentrates on the smaller projects. We feel this balanced approach to our program is a more efficient use of tax dollars and allows us to get more improvements completed.
- Our contracted work is not specifically focused on just bridge or roadway improvement work. We annually hire contractors to complete major projects from roadway widening, intersection improvements, bridge rehab/reconstruction projects and rural pavement projects including hot mix asphalt paving, chip seal, and other pavement preservation methods. We also use local contractors for smaller maintenance projects including traffic signal repairs, pavement markings, crack sealing, tree removal and mowing.

We are a firm believer in our employees and feel the work that they do is cost effective and a great value to the tax payers. Utilizing our balanced approach of traditional construction bidding and force account projects we have been able to maintain a safe and effective transportation network in Stark County. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult to continue to do our traditional force account work due to the inflation of labor and materials. Raising the force account limits will allow us to continue the work that we have always completed.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in favor of the proposed force account limits.

Respectfully submitted,



Keith A. Bennett, P.E., P.S.

Stark County Engineer