



Proponent Testimony of Susan Munroe on S. B. No. 188
President & CEO, Van Wert Area Chamber of Commerce
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Troy Balderson, Chair
Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Balderson, Vice Chair Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien, and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as a proponent for Senate Bill 188. My name is Susan Munroe, President & CEO of the Van Wert Area Chamber of Commerce.

Like you, I represent people: hundreds of businesses leaders who touch thousands of lives by the work they do each day. Together with my board, it is my responsibility to advocate for business, promote commerce, and strengthen our local communities by encouraging economic growth.

That is a mission I know many of you agree with and work yourselves, to achieve across Ohio. I'm here today to urge you to take immediate action to improve Ohio law to strengthen our common mission of growing Ohio's economy: fixing our overly-restrictive wind setback rule, which was nearly tripled in 2014 (a change, which made it, by some measures, the most restrictive in the Midwest) and makes wind energy development difficult to the point of impossible. It is, in effect, a prohibition on new wind farm development.

In Van Wert County, we represent both the promise of clean energy investment achieved and denied, since we have the largest wind farm built but others stalled due to the uncertain legal and political climate.

We've seen wind energy yield extraordinary dividends to our businesses, schools, and communities. Avangrid (formerly Iberdrola Renewables) is, by far, the single largest taxpayer in Van Wert County: contributing close to \$2.7 million a year in tax payments- more than the top 11 companies in Van Wert County combined; and pays \$2 million more in annual lease payments to local landowners. Much of the tax money benefits local schools, which one superintendent, Jeff Snyder of Lincolnview Schools, has called a "godsend." Blue Creek Wind Farm also boasts 20 permanent jobs and also created more than 500 construction jobs at peak, with local spending during the two-year construction period totaling about \$25 million.

Many of you are familiar with the on-going successful operation of Blue Creek Wind Farm over the past five years. However, we consider this success story as only the beginning for our community and entire state. We now have the opportunity to welcome two new wind farms to Van Wert County, totaling more than \$1.1 billion dollars in investment and that is a low estimate. What's even more exciting is that Van Wert is home to the largest available certified

industrial megasite in the state. Conveniently, the megasite happens to border one of our future wind farms, which could potentially provide electricity directly to a megasite tenant who has aggressive renewable energy goals.

Statewide, wind energy has resulted in investments just shy of \$1 billion. This drought and flood resistant “cash crop” delivers significant tax benefits to schools, community organizations, income to landowners and local supply chain businesses while supporting county services in communities able to host these wind farms.

Immediate action to correct this problem is necessary because the overly-restrictive wind setback rule not only blocks viable, new wind farm development, but also harms Ohio competitiveness in site selection choices by major employers—and is doing so as we speak. Every quarter, month, and week, Ohio is being evaluated for major facility placement by fast-growing, high-wage paying tech firms such as Amazon, Google, and Apple, and traditional Fortune 500 companies make decisions about where and to what extent to expand existing facilities. Ohio communities are currently on a weaker footing and suffering in these evaluations due to the wind prohibitions—because more and more, leading, large employers are adopting clean energy sourcing policies and factor the availability of clean power into their site selection criteria. Sourcing clean, local energy is now a part of how industry does business.

Ohio chambers of commerce and economic development offices like mine work very hard to attract employers and investment, and we must no longer lose points in site selectors’ evaluations nor the opportunity to produce and sell clean power.

Let’s encourage economic investment in Ohio, not discourage it. Restoring reasonable wind setback standards is a great way to unleash job creators to drive economic activity in rural Ohio and across the state. I urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 188 and allow our communities to harvest their wind to pursue economic growth and prosperity.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to take any questions.

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