

CITY OF ASHTABULA
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Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony today on SB 181. I am Jim Timonere, the City Manager of the City of Ashtabula.

The City of Ashtabula Sanitation Department is one of the few Municipal run rubbish collection services left in Ohio. This department is extremely important to the residents and our quality of life.

In my hometown, we are trying desperately to increase the quality of life and attract working families. It is more important than ever for us to continue to provide this service at a reasonable rate. The certification process helps us do just that. We serve over 6,100 garbage accounts. We do this at a cost below those of private haulers in our area at a rate of \$15.50 a month plus a fuel charge. My last bill totaled \$16.68.

Unfortunately due to our demographics, we certify between \$225,000 and \$250,000 in delinquencies each year. If we are not able to certify these delinquent accounts, a rate increase of approximately \$3.40 per month per account would need to be enacted, punishing those who do pay and assuming those that don't will start. We have a very high poverty rate and a low level of median household income; the fee increase needed to offset the loss of revenue caused by our inability to collect delinquencies through certification to taxes would be untenable for most of those households. A 20% to 25% increase across the board is not a compromise we are willing to discuss. If we are not able to certify these fees, we are essentially giving away services and asking those responsible citizens to pay for it.

Rubbish collection is as much a public utility as electricity, gas, water and sewer service. Every household has to have a safe and efficient way to dispose of the solid waste it generates. Unlike those other utilities, we cannot shut garbage collection off for non-payment. Most of our residential neighborhoods are older, with houses very close to each other. Cutting off garbage collection is just not an option as it would punish the whole neighborhood. The non-paying residents would still haul their garbage to the tree lawn, where it would accumulate until animals tore the bags open and spread the refuse through the streets, bringing rodent and insect infestations. It is bad enough we consistently have household garbage thrown along our less populated and traveled streets by residents in neighboring townships who will not pay the private hauler rates and do not have access to our services. We cannot allow our own residents to treat our streets the same way. No responsible city government would let that happen.

This is about consistency statewide and not limiting it to Charter Counties. We have certified these charges for years. We are asking you to make the necessary changes in this language to not limit this collection process to the very few municipalities in Chartered Counties and to be fair to our Municipality and those not under a Chartered County Government. Our Municipal operations are just as important as those in larger Cities. We want to be treated the same.

We are going to be part of a pilot program for curb side recycling in the very near future and have already invested a sizable amount of money in this project. The recyclables will essentially be collected alongside other household rubbish in separate containers. The success of this program, which is basically mandated by the Ohio EPA, depends upon our ability to maintain a predictable stream of revenue. This certification process has allowed our department to start this program at no additional cost to our residents.

Our Sanitation Department employs 13 hardworking municipal employees who keep our City clean, struggle through all types of weather and dispose of garbage you and I couldn't stomach for a day. These are good paying jobs which support families. Jobs that cannot exist without your support of this bill.

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee, thank you again for allowing me to present this testimony on SB 181 to you today. This bill is an easy way to rectify what I hope was a simple oversight in the ORC, and I urge your support of it.

Sincerely,



James M. Timonere