

BARBARA BEHLING
PROPONENT TESTIMONY HOUSE BILL 6
SENATE ENERGY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE
JUNE 19, 2019

Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chairman McColley, Ranking member Williams and members of the committee:

My name is Barbara Behling and I live in Champaign County. I am asking for your “yes” vote on HB 6, the Ohio Clean Air Program. I believe the bill in its entirety should be supported and, in particular, the local vote referendum provision.

As you know, currently in Ohio, the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) is the sole decision authority to grant a certificate for an industrial wind facility. The OPSB has seven voting members - all unelected and therefore unaccountable to Ohioans. These 7 people have total control over how your or my community may eventually look. This is clearly “turbine invasion” without representation.

There are several problems with this current process.

First, wind farms are not farms. They are industrial electric facilities. If they were farms, the county auditor would not remove the land that houses the facility from agricultural use. In every other case, when an owner wants to remove land from agricultural use, approval is made locally, either through the local zoning board or through a vote by the local residents.

Second, it is impossible for OPSB members to do in-depth research on communities that developers have targeted for industrial wind facilities. The OPSB largely depends on the developer’s application and a cursory “drive through” of an area to get a feel for the community. This is inadequate. That is why, even after a drive-through of Champaign County, the OPSB said they were not aware that the local airport houses Care Flight medical air transport for the region. And the developer did not disclose that up front.

People who live in an area know it best. They know what they do and do not want to see when looking out their window or driving into town. Seven Ohioans should not make that decision for the rest of us.

According to the National Conference of States Legislatures, out of all 50 states, less than 10 have total control over both the approval and the siting decisions for industrial wind facilities. In the remaining 40+ states, either all the decisions, or at a minimum the siting decisions, are retained at the county/township level. Clearly, Ohio is in the minority by denying affected residents some say in whether to accept an industrial wind facility.

Do your own internet search. You will find community after community making their own decisions about wind facilities. Tippecanoe Co., IN; DeWitt Co., IL; Nemaha Co., Kan; Worth, NY; San Bernadino Co., CA; Lancaster Co., Neb; Monitor Twp., MI; Marion Co., MN, etc. etc. etc.

Wind lobbyists claim that local residents already have control over the approval of a wind facility via the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) process. This is a total fabrication. Although the decision to grant or not grant a PILOT rests with county commissioners, their decision does not advance or stop a wind facility from being built in their county. That decision is still totally granted to the state via the OPSB.

In Feb. 2019, Erie County Commissioners voted down the PILOT for 71 turbines in Erie and Huron counties, a project known as Emerson Creek. Regardless, the wind company is still seeking OPSB approval and just this month filed additional memos with the OPSB. And in June 2016, Logan County Commissioners voted down the PILOT for turbines in Logan County, a project known as Scioto Ridge. But 2 weeks ago, the company held a groundbreaking ceremony for Scioto Ridge, which includes 8 turbines in Logan county.

Obviously, even when the local community does all they can to discourage wind facilities in their neighborhood, the state can and does override the local decision.

Ohioans deserve better. The right to decide local quality of life and development issues must be returned to us. The right of referendum is a simple and fair way to accomplish this.

Therefore, I request you retain the referendum provision in HB 6.