

Ohio Senate Bill 234
Proponent Testimony of William Kaltenbach
Huron County, Ohio
January 28, 2020

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Energy and Public Utilities Committee:

My name is William Kaltenbach and my wife and I reside at 3337 Sandhill Road, Bellevue, Ohio in Huron County. I come before you today as a proponent of Senate Bill 234 which provides for the possibility of a local referendum to place the issue of industrial wind projects being built, or not, in the hands of those affected the most, the local residents.

Over the past year or so, many in our county, particularly the western portion, have expressed their support of or opposition to the proposed Emerson Creek Industrial Wind project. I have attended public meetings mandated by the Ohio Power Siting Board, Commissioner meetings in Huron, Erie and Seneca counties, court proceedings regarding wind projects, and related legislative actions here in Columbus. I have listened to numerous testimonials, again, both for and against these projects. After all of this, one thing stands out above all else. The introduction of these giant wind projects that could encompass approximately 250 square miles of Northwest Ohio, divides the communities in which they are proposed and, in many cases, divides families as well. Between November of 2018 when many of us first heard about Emerson Creek and March of 2019, the focus locally was on whether or not to pass the Payment in Lieu of Taxes or PILOT for the Emerson Creek project.

On March 19, our Huron County commissioners asked for input from local government bodies affected by the Emerson Creek project whether to support or oppose the PILOT. Three of the affected townships voted NO, one did not respond and one voted YES. The one township voting YES, was Lyme Township. In that township, one trustee is a major leaseholder and another is actually employed by the wind developer, APEX. So, some pretty obvious bias there and ethics don't seem to come into play. On March 21, 2019, our three County Commissioners voted unanimously against granting the PILOT. In their comments prior to voting, it was expressed that all three of them were disappointed by how the proposed project was breaking up the area and causing conflict. One Commissioner commented as to how the PILOT was to be a form of local control on these projects assuming that without it, the projects would not move forward. He went on to say that many things have changed – technology, the economy, etc. and that the cost of building wind projects had declined to the point where the PILOT was no longer the local control that it was intended to be. He also encouraged those in attendance that day to contact their State Representatives and State Senators and tell them what is wrong with the current process and what people would like to see changed. Finally, he stated that the current process just doesn't work anymore. Well, we couldn't agree more. The current process just doesn't work anymore.

On October 10, 2019 the Seneca County Commissioners voted unanimously to endorse pending legislation introduced in the Ohio House by Representative Reineke which called for a referendum vote for alternative energy projects. In an accompanying open letter on local control

of utility-scale wind development these commissioners stated, “it is therefore our recommendation that there be an effort undertaken at the Statehouse to return to local control.”

On December 12, 2019, at their quarterly meeting, the Erie County Trustee Association voted unanimously to request the Ohio Township Association to review and consider public backing of HB 401 and SB 234. In their letter to the state township association dated December 13, 2019, they stated that the important and key points of these two bills are safety and a local vote. They went on to say that by endorsing these two bills, the members realize that they are not endorsing or rejecting industrial wind projects but simply improving safety standards and giving local constituents a voice in government. In closing, the letter states, “our membership firmly believes that the government closest to the people has the best feel for the interests of its voters and these two bills have core interests of the voters and local control as their theme.” A copy of this letter is included in your packet. (Exhibit A)

On January 6, 2020, the Thompson Township trustees in Seneca county passed a resolution to intervene against the Republic Wind Project and to oppose all future wind development in their township due to quote “overwhelming local opposition” end quote. A copy of their resolution is included in your packet. There are currently twelve townships in a three-county area that will potentially be impacted by pending wind projects. Of those twelve, ten have opposed the project in some manner.

There are currently two large industrial wind parks in various stages of the approval process taking place in a three-county area in North Central Ohio - Seneca, Huron, and Erie counties. With additional projects forecast for the area, we will have nearly 250 square miles of rural residential area transformed into an industrial park. Most of you who have not been through the approval and siting process that currently exists in Ohio are probably unaware of the local impact even before turbines are built. It is quite divisive and brings up all kinds of controversial topics such as property rights, safety, long-term health concerns, property devaluation, economic development, industrial invasion of areas zoned residential and agricultural, etc. It divides and marginalizes whole communities. If you have not lived through this in your home districts, please listen to those who have, the county commissioners, township trustees, state representatives, state senators and local citizens.

Over the past several months, members of our multi-county coalition seeking a greater local voice, have written hundreds of letters, made countless phone calls, sent numerous e-mails and spoken personally to legislators seeking change to the current system. We have traveled to Columbus on several occasions to offer testimony both at the statehouse and the Public Utilities Commission. We are aware of dissenting points of view. I read the testimony of the Chairman of the Paulding County Commissioners who are opposed to companion bill HB 401. And that's fine. If Paulding County wants wind development, then fill the county. We are simply asking our state legislators to give all of us, pro and con, a true voice in the single biggest event to impact to our communities in our lifetime. Please support SB 234 in its entirety. Thank you.