

March 23, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Chair Smith, and Members of the House Public Utilities Committee,

My name is Carolyn Gibeaut and I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opposition to HB 118 for its impact on landowners. Today I speak on behalf of my parents, Roy and Wilda Styer, and our family as farm landowners in Liberty Township. My parents bought and worked on their farm for over 62 years, only leaving because of their declining health with my father passing shortly thereafter about 5 years ago. At that time, we retained the farmland as income for my 96-year mother. In 2018, a project developer approached our family with an offer to lease our land for a solar farm project. We were NOT coerced. We were NOT pressured. As a family we discussed the pros and cons of participating in such a long-term project. As a responsible landowner and neighbor, we did consider in our lease the very issues that worry the community: screenings for neighboring land, drainage impacts, noise, and water pollution, and finally, land reclamation at the project's end. We viewed this as an opportunity to keep our farm for generations, not just a few years. We worked to ensure that our 4- and 6-year-old family members will not be left with a mess when they are overseeing the land's reclamation in decades to come. In reaching a decision, we tried to think what my late father's comments would be on this opportunity. The word, "Progress", immediately came to mind. He would see this project as a sign of progress and the future. He would say that we live in a time where more and more industries and people are looking to use renewable energy and now, we could be a part of meeting that need. He would look at the stability that fixed payments would give to the family income, rather than our dependence on the weather, government policy or the commodity, seed, and chemical prices. He would also point out whose name is on the deed and who pays the taxes, earning our family the right to do with it what we see fit. After much deliberation and research along with much guidance from our family attorney, we moved forward with leasing arrangements and began looking forward to watching the project's progress.

Now, we are facing the impact of your bill. Frankly, I find it infuriating that many of the opponents of these solar projects are those who have moved out to the county and now want to control what opportunities long time landowners can or cannot select. Most of the families that are participating in our solar project have also worked their land for generations and have determined the best use of their land. These energy projects will allow many families to continue their farming operations during bad years, reduce the need for borrowing funds and provide incentives to keep the land together rather than chopping it up into housing and selling to highest bidder. Ironically, many of the people who are crying the loudest now live on housing plots that not long ago were part of

farms Were these people here in the 1950's when my parents tracked every nickel so they could meet the mortgage payment? Probably not. Did they watch them milk cows for 32 years, make hay when it was 110 degrees and then haul hay at 10 below? Probably not. Did they have to rebuild buildings when a tornado destroyed them? Probably not. The design of this bill could result in the community holding up projects that were entered into in good faith by the landowner and the Project developer. If I felt a referendum would present facts, not just fears and internet social media hype, I would be less fearful. However, having watched the reactions from those attending the same informational meeting that I did, and seeing how twisted some reactions were, I have grave doubts for a fair discussion of facts, not just rumors and Social Media hype.

The Ohio government has already created the Ohio Power Siting Board that has oversight and addresses the issues that communities have over these projects. The OPSB has requirements for extensive testing and documentation regarding building, maintenance, operation, and reclamation. The Ohio Power Siting Board already has the responsibility to make sure these projects do not negatively affect the land, water, wildlife, and people in the community. They offer the opportunity for community posting and testimony. If there are real issues with these solar or wind projects that the OPSB is not addressing, then fix the board process. Do not put forward this legislation that sounds like socialism where the means of production, distribution, and land use is regulated by the community. This legislation is a slippery slope to take away farmers and landowners rights to use their property as they see fit. And to have an election will only bring more conflict with neighbor against neighbor. That is a reason to fix any real issues at the OPSB instead of trying to use referendums.

Ohio also wants to be leader in bringing in new, better jobs to our state. Hamstringing these energy projects will only lead Ohio to fall further behind in sourcing the alternative energy that the future job producing industries are demanding. This bill is not beneficial for the environment, for employment, or for the economics of our rural communities.

I implore you to not rip the right to decide from the landowners. They have taken the time to review and welcome this opportunity to better their legacies, to better their community through increased revenues for the county, township, schools, and libraries and to be a contributor in renewable energy. Please do not support the continuation of this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I welcome any questions you may have.

Carolyn Styer Gibeaut