

House Public Utilities Committee  
House Bill 118  
Opposition Testimony  
March 23, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to provide testimony on House Bill 118. My name is Jane Sweet and my brother and I are fourth-generation farm owners in Greene County.

Agriculture faces an onslaught of challenges year after year including unpredictable weather, rising production costs, and decreasing profit margins. Farming practices continually change to keep up with increasing demands for our corn, soybeans, and wheat. Industrial agriculture requires large, expensive machinery that keeps us in debt. Many jobs existing a decade ago have changed or disappeared; our industry will look vastly different 30 years from now. Right now, farmers need to think differently and plan for changes to our industry. Adapting to the innovation that fuels our economy is key. Today's agriculture requires crop diversification, sustainable farming practices, and forward-thinking ideas.

My family and I are working with Kingwood Solar, and have committed part of our land to the project. This was a family decision and we are proud to be able to use our land to generate clean energy. Many believe that solar is a crop of the future and is one of many paths to diversification. Ohio State University Extension research shows the steady decline of western Ohio cropland and cash rent values. Solar farms on privately-owned land is one way to preserve our farms, maintain production, and increase value for future generations.

The sustainable practice of allowing the land to lie fallow is a regenerative technique. The solar farm will provide pollinator habitat plantings within the arrays and reduce carbon emissions. By allowing the soil to lie fallow, rainwater runoff will filter into our aquifer with greatly reduced amounts of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, all goals of the H2Ohio water initiative.

Solar project participants retain ownership of their land. The solar array infrastructure has an eye on the future of energy. Solar arrays can be removed and recycled, returning land to agricultural production in the future. The solar lease company is committed to restoring the land at the end of the project at its expense. We believe this project is preferable to selling our land for permanent, non-agricultural use. Septic systems and concrete parking lots are not easily recycled.

Solar power is low-lying, emission free, and once construction is done, it makes a nice quiet neighbor. I know community members voice concerns, and I want to address this from my perspective. Since 2001, in the townships surrounding the proposed Kingwood Solar project, a large number of farm acres have changed hands. Many of those acres are now houses, not crop land. Farm families sold off individual building lots, entire farms or farm parcels through auction, land developer, or privately. I did not have any say, or any right to decide in the ultimate use of their land. I trusted they would develop their land in a way that was right for their family and our community. My concern is the one commercial use of farmland adding the most value to the local economy may be subject to a referendum. Imagine, a referendum for a clean solar energy project, not required in any other industry in Ohio!

The solar company I am working with has hosted community meetings, has a website, Facebook page, and has made their team available to the community. We will be doing natural screening, pollinators, and many other features that go above and beyond industry standards. Our solar project has character. It is not a block of unsightly panels; it curves along farm roads and through woods. It could serve as a science

project for schools and universities to demonstrate how technologically advanced structures and Nature can work together in harmony.

The Kingwood Solar clean energy project will add \$1.5 million to our local schools and governments annually, benefitting local families, local schools, townships, and Greene County. It will also provide a stable source of revenue for years to come by creating 300 construction jobs and other long-term employment opportunities. The next generation of farmers should have opportunities, not obstacles. It is our hope that our community will recognize the value this solar project will add to our community by welcoming the participation of new, clean energy production for current and future generations to come.