

HOUSE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE
CHRIS AICHHOLZ PROPONENT TESTIMONY
Am. Sub. Senate Bill 52
June 22, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Committee, my name is Chris Aichholz and I reside in rural Seneca County. This bill is critical for me and many Ohioans and is something we have been working to obtain for the last three years. I am writing you today to urge you to pass this important piece of legislation as urgently as possible. Ohio has become the target of excessive utility scale wind and solar projects and under the current system is not capable of ensuring the protection of Ohioans.

This updated version of SB 52 represents a compromise with all impacted parties and works to provide a needed voice to Ohioans. In a perfect world we would have been able to maintain our local voice at the Township level to ensure that the people experiencing the greatest impact would have been heard more effectively. However, we squarely recognize that this amended version will still provide us with some level of representation.

I have witnessed first-hand the devastation that these projects have on communities under the current system that lacks any meaningful local control. Counties, Townships, Park Districts, School Districts, residents, etc. spend large sums of money unnecessarily just to have a limited seat at the table in a deficient process. Should this bill become law much of that undue financial burden would be lifted off these parties as a simpler mechanism would allow them a real voice. Some communities largely benefit from these projects while some will determine that utility scale projects do not fit their communities' plans. That is the real beauty of this legislation as it works to find a reasonable balance to ensure a clean path forward for development or a significant voice for communities if they determine a project is not a good fit.

The current Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) process lacks the ability to give Ohioans a substantive voice when they evaluate these projects. Take my county for example, in the Republic Wind Project you have the County Commissioners, the Township Trustees (in the project's footprint), local municipal airport, local school district, County Park District, and overwhelming majority of residents file opposition, intervene in opposition, or pass resolutions against the project yet the project continues toward approval. Only the local community can determine if their area is a good fit for utility scale solar or wind development. That is what makes this legislation necessary and why I hope this committee votes yes.

Thousands of people in NW Ohio are counting on you to help fix a broken system and it is as simple as passing SB52. Please act on this bill today and help Ohioans in securing a voice in these massive industrial projects. We appreciate the efforts of the sponsors to find a compromise we can all live with.