

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 64. My name is Emily Keeler and I serve as President of Council for the City of Grandview Heights. I am submitting my testimony in opposition to House Bill 64, as it would significantly impede our communities from conducting public infrastructure improvements. As these needs continually change, our duly elected local government officials must have the flexibility and authority to meet the demands of our residents.

To give some background, Grandview Heights is just two miles from the Capital Building. We are surrounded not only by the Olentangy and Scioto Rivers, but also the trails that run along these waterways. Many of our visitors bike to our community and many residents bike or walk to work, including myself. I walk mostly on the Olentangy Bike Trail to get to my main job at Ohio State University. While designated a recreational trail, this is my, and many others, pedestrian and biking superhighway. It is also a path many of our children use before they can drive, allowing them to access additional work or recreational opportunities, including my own teenage son.

I am deeply concerned about language in House Bill 64 that would remove recreational trails from the definition of “public use” in Ohio’s eminent domain law. Trails are a critical asset to Central Ohio and our community, both for recreational purposes and commuting, and are widely used across the region and specifically in and around Grandview Heights.

Trails are integral to a community’s quality of life and offer numerous benefits to residents and visitors alike. They provide space for health and wellness activities, which is needed now more than ever as Ohio is now in the top ten for obesity, a jump from 19<sup>th</sup> in 2016. Trails are also a key component in our transportation network, connecting neighborhoods to jobs, schools, health care, retail, and greenspace. Perhaps most importantly, residents also like them. In a statewide survey conducted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, over 82 percent of respondents indicated trails are “extremely important” or “very important” to their daily lives. When asked what prevents them from using trails, 42 percent of respondents answered that there are not enough trails, and 35 percent said trails are too far away. This survey reaffirms what we already hear from our residents: trails and greenways are a resource people value. Restricting our ability to expand and enhance them will only hinder us from improving the overall quality of life for our community.

We also recognize that trails are just one part of a robust transportation network, and as transportation needs evolve in any community, local governments must be prepared to respond. New development, jobs, and housing will always bring new public service challenges and greater transportation needs. While local governments and park districts rarely use eminent domain for trails, it is a necessary tool of last resort when making significant investments in complex networks. House Bill 64 would eliminate this option and make it more difficult to fill gaps in regional trails, such as the Central Ohio Greenways network.

Chair Hillyer and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to submit opponent testimony on House Bill 64. I strongly urge you to reject these measures and protect our ability to meet constituent needs. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 850-212-1391 or [ekeeler@grandviewheights.gov](mailto:ekeeler@grandviewheights.gov).