



COLUMBIANA COUNTY LAND REUTILIZATION CORPORATION

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Testimony to the House Finance Committee
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Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing us to submit Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 33 regarding the state's Main Operating Budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Haedan Panezott, and I am the Executive Director of the Columbiana County Land Reutilization Corporation (CCLRC). CCLRC operates as the sole county wide residential and commercial blight remediation entity in our county. A large portion of our focus is also on brownfield remediation as we see the need to recover post-industrial and commercial sites to allow for the potential of economic development. Our mission is to one day remove all the blight in our county, to re-establish property value to once vacant homes and to provide the opportunity for economic growth.

Brownfield Successes Over Past Two Years

Recognizing the challenge presented to Ohio by the presence of brownfields, the FY22-23 main operating budget established the Brownfield Remediation Fund (BRF), providing \$350 million to assess and cleanup these environmentally contaminated sites. We commend the Legislature for the inclusion of this program, and the Ohio Department of Development in its administration of this successful program. The Brownfield Remediation Fund's \$350 million provided grants to 313 projects in 83 of Ohio's 88 counties. While this is a significant investment in the assessment and cleanup of brownfields, the need remains for grant dollars to remediate and redevelop these blighted brownfields into productive use.

Addressing the Ongoing Need for Revitalization

The as-introduced budget does not include funding for the Brownfield Remediation Fund, and therefore, we are here today to encourage the committee to provide an additional \$350 million to this program in the FY24-25 budget. The initial investment of \$350 million granted 188 cleanup grants, which is the final step in the remediation process to address environmental contamination and allow these brownfields to become new industrial and commercial sites, new housing, mixed-use space, or developable land. CCLRC has had experience in working in a variety of brownfield remediation projects. Such projects include three abandoned gas station cleanup projects and a large-scale brownfield remediation project through the Ohio Department of Development's (ODOD) Brownfield Remediation program. CCLRC has remediated or is in the process of remediating abandoned gas stations in the cities of Salem and Columbiana as well as the Village of Salineville. In Salem, the conclusion of this project resulted with the property being acquired by a developer who has recently started to redevelop the property. The project in the City of Columbiana is still in progress. However, since the start of this project, CCLRC has had an end-use in place that plans to redevelop the property. Additionally, this property is in the heart of the downtown of the city and is a major key to connecting the rest of the city. It has already been highly

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sought after and will be a major win for the city. In the Village of Salineville, this project had just recently finished and is now in the possession of the Village who has plans to work with a local entity to repurpose the property. Through the ODOD Brownfield Remediation program, CCLRC was successful in submitting a project to remediate an abandoned school building which had been vacant for over 20 years. This project is the largest to date that CCLRC has taken on. The building is over 50,000 square feet and sits on a parcel that is over 6.5 acres. The City of East Liverpool has always wanted to redevelop this property as it is a prime location to do so but has never had the funding to be able to. In all four of these projects, the properties had been vacant and abandoned for years and in some instances decades. Without the funding opportunities for brownfield remediation, these properties would still be a vacant blighted deterrent to the community. The CCLRC had also submitted an additional property in East Liverpool, 606 Dresden Avenue, a large commercial site that sits in the center of the downtown area. However, this project was not awarded which has forced our department to seek alternative forms of funding to eliminate this blighted property that is drastically impacting the downtown.

However, 125 projects were granted assessment dollars, which merely determines the contamination present on the site, but does not provide cleanup dollars to complete the work. Without additional funding, these 125 projects will likely remain contaminated, and unable to move into productive economic engines. The availability of assessment dollars is crucial to be able to have the opportunity to fund brownfield remediation projects. CCLRC has completed a multitude of assessments not only on projects that we have been funded but also on projects that we would like to seek in the future. CCLRC has also assisted various communities in getting funding for assessments.

An additional investment of \$350 million to this program will allow the 125 projects that received an assessment to compete for cleanup dollars. In addition to these 125 projects, the need for brownfield grant dollars remains. The final round for applications through ODOD opened and closed in less than 3 business days due to limited funding remaining and an overwhelming number of applications. Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) has worked with lawmakers to have a budget amendment drafted to add this funding into the budget. I am here today to encourage members of the House Finance Committee to include this in the budget. An investment in a brownfield grant program is an economic win for the state, and the communities where remediation occurs. Past research by GOPC shows that for every dollar the state invests, there is a five dollar return in private investment. Ohio's previous brownfield grant program contributed more than one billion dollars to the state's GDP during its tenure.

Conclusion

Chair Edwards, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Haedan Panezott
Executive Director

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