



Joint Committee on Force Account Limits
Greg Wilkens, P.E., P.S. – Butler County
FORCE ACCOUNT limits increase – SUPPORT
April 29, 2021

Co-Chairs Sen. Roegner and Rep. Johnson and members of the Joint Committee on Force Accounts thank you for the opportunity to provide support testimony for an increase in Force Account Limits for local road and bridge projects.

My name is Greg Wilkens, and I am the Butler County Engineer. Butler County is a rapidly urbanizing county with 611 lane miles and 408 bridges located north of Cincinnati and home to 383,134 residents. I am here to testify in support of raising the Force Account limits. While we are ensuring motorist safety, a critical part of the mission of the Butler County Engineer's Office is to be "fiscally responsible and accountable to the public for projects completed and dollars expended." The present force account limits diminish the efficiency of providing our taxpayers the best return on their tax dollars.

When reviewing Force Account limits, a less apparent restraint of the current limits is the **time delay**. To prepare and bid a contract in our county takes a minimum of nine weeks from the time the plans are complete to the time the contractor can mobilize. This process entails creating a legal ad and proposal, securing a date on the Commissioners' meeting agenda to advertise, advertising for two or three weeks, receiving the bid, checking the bid for accuracy, and receiving the Resolution to award the bid and contract.

Let me put this in perspective; in 2020, we closed a bridge due to a potential structural steel failure. The detour around the closure **delayed the EMS and Fire Department ten minutes** in emergency response time in that area. As we have all heard, minutes can make the difference between life and death. Preparing this project to bid took eleven weeks from the time the plans were completed until the construction started; **nine weeks longer** than if we started with our own maintenance crews. We were fortunate there were no life-threatening emergencies during this time.

Another consideration when reviewing the Force Account limits is **hidden costs in contract work**.

- Design costs are approximately 50 percent higher for a contract job than a force account job because of the plan detail.
- Administrative costs in bidding are an added expense not found in Force Account projects.
- Construction management costs for a contract job range from five percent to ten percent of the total contract price.

Let me cite an example: We are presently advertising for a bridge repair. Our Engineer's estimate for the contract is \$232,739. Our Force Account estimate for the same project is \$121,007, therefore costing the taxpayers of Butler County an additional \$111,732. And this does not account for administrative and construction management costs. This project would have fallen within the force account limit in 2003.

The increase of Force Account limits still allows the contractor to build the intermediate and larger projects while our crews can focus on smaller maintenance-type projects. The request to raise Force Account limits IS NOT intended to hire more people or build larger projects. It is solely to keep pace with construction inflation. Thank you for hearing my testimony today. Should you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gregory Wilkens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the 'y'.

Gregory J. Wilkens, P.E., P.S.
Butler County Engineer