

Hello Chairwoman Scott and committee members. My name is Ashlyn Newell and I live in Maple Valley Township in Montcalm County, Michigan. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with you on this issue, which is important not just to my family, but to farm families all across Michigan.

I am blessed to say that I am part of a fourth-generation dairy farm that my husband, his brother, and his father run. I also have a daughter who we are raising on the farm and hope to pass it down to her one day.

While I did not grow up on a farm myself, I have learned how wonderful and hard farming life is through helping my husband on the farm and being an FFA advisor. I am truly passionate about our lifestyle and happy I can raise my daughter on the farm.

As Michigan farms face more competition globally and higher costs here at home, we unfortunately see more and more family farms making the difficult decision to sell, sometimes to large corporate farming operations or even foreign landowners. This is not only hard on families, but it is also bad for our economy and food security. Our world population will continue to grow, and we need family farms to thrive if we want to continue to provide for future generations. Everyday family farms are looking for new and innovative ways to stay afloat. One of those ways is by harvesting renewable energy from the sun and the wind, diversifying their operation and protecting the farm from risks associated with agriculture, including fertilizer and seed costs, adverse weather events, and unpredictable commodity prices.

As a science educator and a farmer's wife I knew that leasing our land for renewable energy would not only allow our family farm to continue for years to come, but also provide a better future for my daughter. Many farmers in my community support wind and solar energy projects for these reasons.

I am no stranger to renewable energy sources, having grown up in the Western United States. Wind and solar have been part of communities out west dating back to the 1980s. When I started to see opposition to these projects, I was shocked and confused. Not only would renewable energy projects help many family farms to stay in business, but it would bring much needed tax revenue to our community. When a project was proposed in my community several years ago, it became clear to me that this opposition was being stoked from outside of our community, with misinformation and at times outright lies spreading over social media and at township meetings about renewable energy and the farm families who had offered to host them on their land.

Many board members in my county lost their seats in frivolous recall elections for the sole reason that they tried to find some middle ground between those who supported the project and those who did not. These former board members struggled with creating regulations for their townships, as no one had the experience or knowledge to build from. Our township boards and planning commissions are typically debating repairing a gravel road or approving a variance for a new pole barn, not complex siting regulations for a half-billion dollar renewable energy project spanning multiple townships.

Despite their lack of experience, our long-time board members did their best to navigate the issue, without any support or protection from the state. Many

researched and reached out to neighboring counties for advice. Board members who dared to be open to wind energy were replaced by people whose explicit intent was to ban wind energy from our county through exclusionary zoning, despite that practice being unlawful according to the Zoning Enabling Act. They followed through on their pledge to create restrictive ordinances, taking away the private property rights of local farmers.

I tell you this because I want you to understand that renewable energy projects that span multiple townships like wind farms are close to impossible for townships to site on their own. We had a chance, as a community, to preserve “local control”, but this process proved that we were incapable of doing that and that’s why we are here today. There is a reason that we handle large infrastructure projects like pipelines and transmission lines at the state level. That’s why I encourage you to support this bill.

By giving this authority to the Michigan Public Service Commission you can ensure these decisions are made in an evidence-based manner by officials with staff support and subject-matter expertise. You will also empower communities to weigh in on the process in a more constructive way, helping to shape projects to fit their host communities and deliver greater benefits.

I want to thank Representatives Aiyash, Puri, and Skaggs for giving this important issue the attention it deserves and hope you vote to protect the property rights of farm families like mine by voting yes on these bills.

Thank you.