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Date: October 11, 2023
To: House Energy, Communications, and Technology Committee
From: Andrew Vermeesch
Legislative Counsel, Michigan Farm Bureau
Re: Written Testimony on House Bills 5120, 5121, 5122, & 5123

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of Michigan Farm Bureau, in strong opposition to House Bill 5120, 5121, 5122, & 5123. As the largest general farm organization in the state, representing over 40,000 farm families, our policy positions are shaped through grassroots efforts, where local members engage in development, debate, and adoption of our policies at both county and state levels.

While Michigan Farm Bureau recognizes the critical role renewable energy plays in our state's transition to a sustainable energy future, we cannot overlook the profound impact this will have on rural areas, particularly our farmland. Michigan's farmland is increasingly targeted by solar and wind developers due to already being cleared and proximity to transmission infrastructure, both of which can dramatically reduce overall project costs.

As such, it is essential to acknowledge that our farmers and rural residents will significantly be impacted by this renewable energy expansion. Michigan Farm Bureau policy supports local siting for these commercial renewable projects and encourages farmers and County Farm Bureaus to collaborate with local governments in establishing zoning and permitting standards. Unfortunately, the bills currently under consideration by the committee threatens to strip away this essential authority, putting the long-term planning and wellbeing of many agricultural communities across the state in jeopardy.

Specifically, the bill package as currently written, would transfer local control for projects to the Michigan Public Utilities Commission, encompassing the majority of such projects. This approach, involving state-level decision-making by unelected officials, risks imposing one-size-fits-all regulations that may fail to adequately account for the diversity of local conditions and preferences across local governments. Each community in Michigan possesses its unique characteristics, and local officials possess an intimate understanding of their geography and landscape conditions, enabling them to evaluate suitable locations for solar and wind projects in a way that state-level authorities cannot. Furthermore, local authorities have the flexibility to negotiate agreements with developers, secure direct economic investment in the community, including job creation, property tax revenue, and land-use agreements that sustain local prosperity.

Lastly Michigan is one of the most diverse agricultural states in the nation, but a rushed approach to renewable energy siting may jeopardize many of our traditional specialty crops and as well as significantly alter the local agricultural economy. At the same time, renewable energy technology is developing rapidly and may allow for better integration of both energy and food production in the future. A more thoughtful approach is needed, one in which local expertise will be vital to achieving truly sustainable outcomes.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of Michigan Farm Bureau's over 40,000 farm families. We strongly urge you to oppose House Bills 5120, 5121, 5122, & 5123 and instead champion policies that uphold local control, promote sustainable energy development, and safeguard our agricultural heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Vermeesch'.

Andrew Vermeesch
Legislative Counsel

