

December 17, 2014

Testimony to Public Works, Procurement and Contracting Committee on the Cuyahoga County Community Benefit and Opportunity Initiative

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Good afternoon Chairperson Jones and members of the committee. My name is Amanda Woodrum and I am the Sustainable Development Researcher at Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with the mission of creating a more prosperous, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. My work centers on growing the local economy in a way that is both equitable and environmentally friendly. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Cuyahoga County Community Benefit and Opportunity Initiative. As you likely know, Policy Matters Ohio was hired to develop a community benefit policy for the county, which we did in collaboration with key stakeholders.

Our process for doing this work involved 1:1 meetings with knowledgeable stakeholders that represent the interests of key constituencies in order to identify issues and priorities. We then convened a small working group that included leaders from the Cleveland Building Trades, Urban League, and Emerald Cities, among others. With technical assistance from national experts at the Partnership for Working Families, the stakeholder group worked together to develop a set of core principles that reflect stakeholder priorities and address pervasive issues. These core principles are embodied in the Community Benefit and Opportunity Initiative.

Nationally, the community benefit movement is a reaction to building and economic development practices that left communities behind, workers impoverished, and the environment degraded. By enabling the Community Benefit and Opportunity Initiative, Cuyahoga County will join a growing number of communities adopting sustainable development practices that help ensure maximum value to the community from the expenditure of public dollars.

The initiative will strengthen the local economy by:

1. Creating more local jobs and ensuring workers in those jobs receive living wages;
2. Ensuring the county's workforce reflects the great diversity of the community;
3. Creating opportunity for disadvantaged workers; targeting residents from the county's poorest neighborhoods for job opportunities;
4. Building career pathways out of poverty through on-the-job training opportunities and support for pre-apprenticeship programs.
5. Ensuring high-quality, energy-efficient building, with cost-effective sustainable technology that will reduce costs to taxpayers in the long run. It will also institute a process that will account for, and mitigate, negative health impacts from publicly funded projects.

We are excited to see the initiative move forward and we remain available to you as a resource as you deliberate. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, non-partisan research institute with offices in Cleveland.