October 30, 2013

The Honorable Bill Seitz
Ohio Senate Public Utilities Committee, Chair
Senate Building
1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Senator Seitz,

We would like to share with you and your colleagues on the Senate Public Utilities Committee some comments related to Senate Bill 58. We are submitting these reflections as an interested party. Our social action ministries and property management priorities, which promote the use of energy efficiency and renewable energy, fairness and assistance to struggling consumers, and strategies for better stewardship of God’s creation, have motivated us to provide input for the committee’s deliberations. Our purpose in this communication is to provide some background on our Church’s teaching on the environment and to highlight the concrete benefits that Ohio’s current energy efficiency policies have thus far provided the Archdiocese.

Our most recent Holy Fathers, Pope Francis, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope John Paul II have all emphasized the critical importance of caring for God’s precious creation and responding to threats to it, such as climate change. This witness emerges from the Catholic Church’s teaching that humanity has a responsibility to treat the natural world as an irreplaceable gift from God, that we have a duty to preserve it for the generations of human life yet to be born, and that the poor and vulnerable of today deserve our special concern, as they have the least capacity to adapt to devastating changes in climate and environment (e.g. increased drought, more intense hurricanes, rising sea levels, etc.). In response, our Church is guided by the cardinal virtue of prudence. According to the U.S. Catholic bishops’ statement, Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good, “Prudence is intelligence applied to our actions... if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind’s well-being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action.”

To us, the findings of the National Academy of Sciences¹, the International Governmental Panel on Climate Change², and the Vatican’s

¹ See: http://nas-site.org/americanclimatechoices/more-resources-on-climate-change/climate-change-lines-of-evidence-booklet/
² See: http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1/#.UoA66iNk8_6
own Pontifical Academy of Sciences provide the necessary threshold of evidence to take mitigating action. Out of prudence, His Holiness Benedict XVI has urged us to advocate for policies that promote “more sober lifestyles,” “improving energy efficiency,” and “research and utilization of forms of energy with lower impact on the environment.”

Locally, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati is striving to live out these principles through our Climate Change Task Force, Property Management Office, and a variety of “care for creation” teams in our parishes.

SB 221 appears to have performed very well in launching a number of energy efficiency projects across the state for large and small consumers and even houses of worship. Many financial burdens have been reduced as a result. Also, it is has apparently caused a surge in Ohio’s renewable energy industry.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has directly benefitted from the environment of incentives made possible by SB 221. The legislation has facilitated our work to lessen our carbon footprint, and consequently, it has lowered our energy bills. This in turn allows our parishes and schools to be better stewards of the generous contributions of our faithful. The incentives are enabling us to overcome upfront capital hurdles, so that we can more feasibly bring energy efficiency projects from paper to fruition. For example, one of our high schools took advantage of the generous SB221 required utility rebate incentives for boilers and lighting to complete a $300,000 energy upgrade. Normally this price tag would make project implementation almost impossible for our schools and parishes. However, the incentives along with the financial benefits of a lower utility bill, made this a $0 project cost over a 10-year loan time period. After the 10-year period, the financial savings from the energy efficiency project will drastically reduce the school’s annual budget by over $30,000 per year. The result of being able to complete the upgrade was much improved lighting, which provided a more positive atmosphere for learning. It allowed for more comfort due to a highly efficient, well controlled boiler, and it brought positive community recognition to the school. These benefits pointedly show that SB 221 is producing many great benefits for our Archdiocese.

Boiler replacement and lighting retrofit projects are becoming quite numerous for Archdiocesan facilities. Part of the reason for this is due to the economic rebate incentives provided by the utilities as required by SB 221. The mere presence of these incentives is bringing attention to the reality that investing money in high efficiency upgrades results in great long-term energy and financial savings. This leads to more Archdiocesan facilities looking into and eventually enacting energy efficiency projects. The increase in energy efficiency projects, of course, also results in more construction jobs for the region. As an example, rebates on occupancy sensors in the Dayton area are so good that it has made us realize that the Dayton Archdiocesan headquarters can install these sensors with just a two-year payback. Thus, we are in the process of enacting a contract to install these sensors. The result will be increased energy and cost savings, an investment to help protect the environment, and more jobs in the region. The economic incentives available to our Archdiocese do indeed create an upward spiral of economic benefit for Ohio.

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4 If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation, no. 9, 2010.
Thus, as you proceed with developing SB 58, we ask that you please be cautious not to abandon or impair incentives that are effectively promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy in Ohio. This effective use of government expectations seems to be yielding concrete results that help God’s creation and many institutions’ bottom line, including ours.

Thank you very much for considering our comments. Please feel free to contact us for more information. We will keep your deliberations in our prayers as you evaluate the various testimonies before you and shape Ohio’s future energy landscape.

Sincerely,

Jeff Bohrer, M.S., P.E.
Director of Property Management

Tony Stieritz
Director Catholic Social Action Office

Jim Rogers
Advocacy Committee Chair Climate Change Task Force

cc:  Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr, Archbishop of Cincinnati
     Carolyn Jurkowitz, Catholic Conference of Ohio
     Members of Ohio Senate Public Utilities Committee