

Chair Bill Johnson
Opening Statement – Subcommittee on Environment, Manufacturing, and
Critical Materials:
“Revitalizing America Through the Reauthorization of the Brownfields
Program”
September 27, 2023
As prepared for delivery

Welcome, everyone, to today’s Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials Subcommittee’s hearing on “Revitalizing America Through the Reauthorization of the Brownfields Program.”

This has long been a very bipartisan issue, so let me be clear at the outset...I look forward to working with all my colleagues, both Democrat and Republican, on extending this important program to promote environmental cleanup and economic redevelopment across our country.

Our hearing today is timely, because the Brownfields Program formally expires this year.

Importantly, today’s hearing also reaffirms this Committee’s jurisdiction over the program and advances the reauthorization process through Regular Order.

I appreciate our witnesses for joining us today to shed light on how EPA’s Brownfields Program is currently working, identify opportunities for improvement, and find ways to monitor the progress of grant-funded projects, particularly since the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided an unprecedented infusion of funding to the EPA for brownfields.

The Brownfields Program provides critical grant funding and liability protections that allow states, communities, and stakeholders to clean up and redevelop previously contaminated sites.

I’m proud to have represented Eastern and Southeastern Ohio with its rich history of manufacturing and industrial development, and I have seen the significant benefits of brownfields investments in and around my own district.

For example, I mentioned this in our last brownfields hearing, the district lines have changed since 2020, but in May 2020 under the Trump Administration, the EPA awarded \$600,000 in Brownfields Program funding to clean up former industrial sites in Ironton and Coal Grove, in southern Ohio.

This was and continues to be a big deal for these rural, Appalachian communities with a proud history of manufacturing and industry along the Ohio River.

But also looking to Northeast Ohio, I was proud, just a couple years ago, to speak with local leaders and tour the, “Wick 6” brownfields site in Youngstown, which also received a substantial grant from the EPA.

Friends, the point is that many of you have probably seen similar successes of these Brownfield grants in your districts. So, I believe we can build on recent successes of the Brownfields

Program so communities all across America can benefit from the EPA's dual environmental and economic investment.

So the discussion draft we're focusing on today includes five legislative tweaks to strengthen the Brownfields Program.

First, the draft creates the Rural Brownfields Showcase Program with grants for communities with populations less than 50,000 residents and less than 100,000 residents.

I represent several rural counties, as do many of our subcommittee members, and we strongly believe that the Rural Brownfields Showcase Program would ensure that these communities are not left behind.

In addition, oversight of brownfields is incredibly important, and the Discussion Draft outlines unique roles for EPA and EPA's Office of Inspector General to conduct internal audits to ensure that federal funds are awarded properly.

Simply increasing overall funding levels for brownfields without carefully crafted oversight mechanisms could lead to lower quality projects, not to mention waste, fraud, and abuse.

The draft also increases the involvement of local governing officials by adding local concurrence as a condition of EPA awards.

Furthermore, the Discussion Draft allows private, for-profit limited liability partnerships whose application has the backing of the local government, a State sanctioned redevelopment agency, or a non-profit to receive grants under the Brownfields Program.

If we're looking to stretch federal dollars to the fullest, we should include these relevant stakeholders in the process.

Finally, the draft authorizes appropriations for five years, through fiscal year 2028, providing necessary certainty to the program to encourage more investment and economic development.

Of note, authorization amounts in the discussion draft are intentionally blank.

I have some concerns with permanently increasing grant amounts and waiving cost-sharing requirements, but I hope that today's conversation and future conversations will allow us to reach a consensus.

I look forward to working with my Republican and Democratic colleagues, the EPA, state and local officials, and private-sector stakeholders...to help ensure that the Brownfields Program continues to bolster communities by funding environmental cleanup and economic redevelopment across the country.

Thank you, and I yield back.