

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Revitalizing America Through the Reauthorization of the Brownfields Program”

September 27, 2023

Today we are discussing the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Brownfields Program and the majority’s discussion draft to update and reauthorize the program through Fiscal Year 2028. The Brownfields program is a shining example of how government can both stimulate economic growth and protect public health in local communities.

In 2002, I partnered with the late Representative Paul Gillmor of Ohio, who Chaired this Subcommittee at the time, to write the Brownfields law. Since then, the Brownfields Program has consistently enjoyed bipartisan support, including the historic funding boost that was passed as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law last Congress.

Over the last 20 years, the Brownfields Program has been an economic engine for local government and communities looking to turn former contaminated sites into economic centers and green spaces. As part of this program, the federal government provides financial help in the form of loans or grants for cleanup, assessments, and job training so communities can turn dilapidated sites into parks, public housing, or new business centers. By revitalizing these properties – communities are growing their economies for the future and creating good-paying jobs. For every dollar we invest in the Brownfields Program, we get twenty dollars back in economic return.

Since the inception of the program, 37,000 sites and 163,000 acres have been revitalized and made ready for development around the nation. Not only does the program clean up formerly contaminated sites and boost economic development, but it also benefits public health and safety by reducing contamination in communities that couldn’t afford to repurpose the site on their own. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed through Congress and signed by President Biden two years ago injected \$1.5 billion in the Brownfields Program. This historic investment also eliminated cost-share requirements for applicants and increased the grant amounts. Since that time, the EPA has awarded \$215 million in grants to 262 communities around the country.

And that’s just the beginning. We funded the Brownfields Program through Fiscal Year 2026 in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, so we will need to reauthorize and fund the program again in the near future. That’s why today’s hearing is so important. I believe that starting these bipartisan conversations early is a necessary first step. I hope we can all agree that this program is more than worth every dollar we put into it, and that we can work together to maintain robust funding moving forward.

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The Republicans have put forward a discussion draft to reauthorize the program. I have reservations about some of the provisions included in the draft, particularly the provision that would, for the first time, allow private companies to access the limited public funds for this program. The Brownfields Program was never intended to provide cleanup and revitalization funding to for-profit organizations, and I don't believe that it should start now. Nevertheless, I look forward to working with my colleagues so that we can continue the bipartisan tradition and ensure that any final reauthorization legislation benefits the communities it is meant to serve.

I am pleased to see EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator Barry Breen here today. Having EPA's direct input on the legislation will be invaluable as we move forward on Brownfields reauthorization. I would also like to welcome the local leaders and stakeholders joining us on the second panel. I especially want to thank Mayor Bollwage from Elizabeth, New Jersey, for being here today. He has a long history of advocating for Brownfields and testifying before the Committee in support of the program.

Finally, it's important to recognize that all the great work being done at EPA on the Brownfields Program would be jeopardized if House Republicans cave to the extreme elements in their party and force a government shutdown. Program officers could not distribute grant money, cleanups could not be completed, and communities would be stuck in a state of limbo waiting for the Republican House to figure out how to function and to govern. Across the country, communities are waiting for critical Brownfields funding to break ground on their transformational projects. We owe it to all of them to figure out a path forward.

Thank you and I yield back.