

NARC

Building Regional Communities

National Association of Regional Councils

660 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 440

Washington, DC 20001

202.986.1032

www.NARC.org

March 28, 2017

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Garret Graves
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water Resources & Environment
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water Resources & Environment
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster, Ranking Member DeFazio, Chairman Graves, and Ranking Member Napolitano:

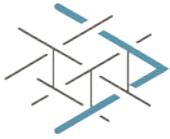
Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement to the record on behalf of regional councils across the country in support of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields program. The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) represents metropolitan planning organizations, councils of government, and other regional planning organizations throughout the nation. The EPA Brownfields program is an extremely successful and important program for our members.

Since its creation, the EPA Brownfields program has provided crucial assistance to local governments for reclaiming hazardous, polluted, and underutilized properties. To date, there have been over 26,000 brownfields assessments and 1,200 brownfields cleanups nationally, which has led to over 123,000 jobs. Each of the \$22 billion federal dollars that have been invested since the program was established in 2002 have leveraged approximately \$16 in other investments, close to \$400 billion in total.

While many communities have benefited from brownfields redevelopment efforts under this program, the U.S. Government Accountability Office estimates there are between 400,000 and 600,000 remaining brownfields sites throughout the United States. To build upon these past successes and assist in the cleanup, reuse, and redevelopment of remaining sites, some key improvements to the program are needed.

NARC understands the fiscal challenges and constraints faced by the U.S. Congress, and strongly encourages you to authorize and fully fund the Brownfields program to at least previously authorized levels. At current appropriation levels, EPA has had to turn away many highly qualified applicants due to a lack of funding. EPA estimates that for the past 5 years, over 1,700 requests for viable projects were not awarded money because of limited funding. EPA estimates that if they were able to provide funding to those turned away applicants, an additional 50,000 jobs would have been created along with \$12 billion of leveraged funding.

Additionally, many of the brownfield sites that remain are more difficult to redevelop due to their level of contamination or marketplace conditions. Communities would appreciate the expansion of this



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program to help address the cleanup challenges at these more complex sites. We also encourage Congress to revise the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA) to encourage and protect local communities who choose to take ownership of blighted properties for the purpose of brownfields redevelopment where the local government had no role in creating the contamination.

Regional councils across the country benefit from this wide-reaching program. The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) in Kansas City, MO has secured and implemented about \$24.2 million of federal and state brownfields funding to leverage approximately \$355.7 million in actual cleanup and new construction since 1997. MARC estimates an average return on investment of about \$15 for every \$1 of public funds in brownfield projects in the Kansas City two-state region.

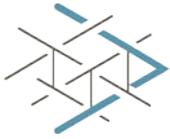
In the New Orleans, LA region the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (NORPC) has leveraged over \$77 million in funding to clean up 27 brownfields sites and create 115 permanent jobs, in addition to numerous construction jobs. An additional 375 jobs are expected to be created from projects currently underway. In total, environmental issues at over 58 acres of vacant and abandoned land have been assessed to facilitate their redevelopment with a \$1:\$91 ratio for brownfield investment to redevelopment investment. NORPC focuses on sites that will spur further redevelopment and support local businesses. In addition, many of the sites are owned by nonprofits looking to fill a community need such as senior housing, schools, community meeting/ performance space, and community gardens.

The Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Regional Planning Commission on the Ohio-West Virginia-Pennsylvania border has received almost \$3 million in EPA funding for sites that would otherwise remain vacant without this program. They have leveraged over \$65 million of private investment for these sites that have created 1,074 jobs. In this multi-state area, a community stakeholder group meets regularly as part of a Brownfield Task Force to select sites for performance assessments under their brownfields programs.

The Greater Portland Council of Governments in Maine has identified 400 brownfield sites since 2009 and have leveraged over \$18 million from public and private sources to reclaim polluted properties available for development, however many sites still remain contaminated and unusable. The federal brownfields program helps return polluted properties to community use and Portland, Maine's 400 potential sites would benefit from funding to encourage their productive use and improve public safety.

President Trump has made reinvesting in America and putting people back to work as key priorities for his administration. In order to make this happen and to do so quickly, Congress should utilize existing programs. NARC believes that the Brownfields program would be a strong candidate for any type of reinvestment initiative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express our support for the EPA Brownfields program. It is clear that regional councils benefit from this program, evidenced by the high return on investment and job creation. Small improvements could be made regarding liability issues and flexibility in using funds. Please reference our joint letter with the National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, and U.S. Conference of Mayors for more specific improvements to the program. We look forward to



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working with you on a reauthorization to help communities across the country redevelop brownfields and build better regions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leslie Wollack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leslie Wollack
Executive Director
National Association of Regional Councils