



2019 Year in Review



A letter from the Executive Director, Rachael Belz

I will forever remember 2019 as a time of great challenge. You know what I mean if you saw one of the prime-time TV commercials meant to sway public opinion in favor of House Bill 6, a \$1 billion customer-funded bailout of Ohio's two nuclear plants, owned by FirstEnergy Solutions. To add to the sting, by the time the bill was passed, it included a bailout for two antique coal plants and gutting of our renewable energy and efficiency programs.

Our opposition spent \$50 million on advertising alone, to say nothing of the millions more spent on populating the legislature and governor's office with people more likely to add to the \$11 billion FirstEnergy had already received in customer bailouts. Our opposition's remarkably deep pockets also paid to interfere with the democratic process, as they whipped up racist sentiment, created confusion and hired people to block citizens from signing a petition to put the bailout on the ballot. They even paid petitioners not to turn in signatures and offered them money to quit and go home.

It's a tremendous testament to the wisdom and power of Ohioans that even though our opponents won the day, it cost them dearly. It also took far more time than they anticipated and they won by just one vote. They pulled out all the stops to block opposition to the bailout because they

knew that if we had the chance to vote, most of us would vote no.

I'm extremely proud of how the team at Ohio Citizen Action worked together in 2019, from the field canvass to the phone canvass to the program and administrative staff. House Bill 6 was our main focus for the year, but it wasn't all we worked on. As you review our accomplishments and impact for the year, I hope you understand that you are a crucial part of what we do.

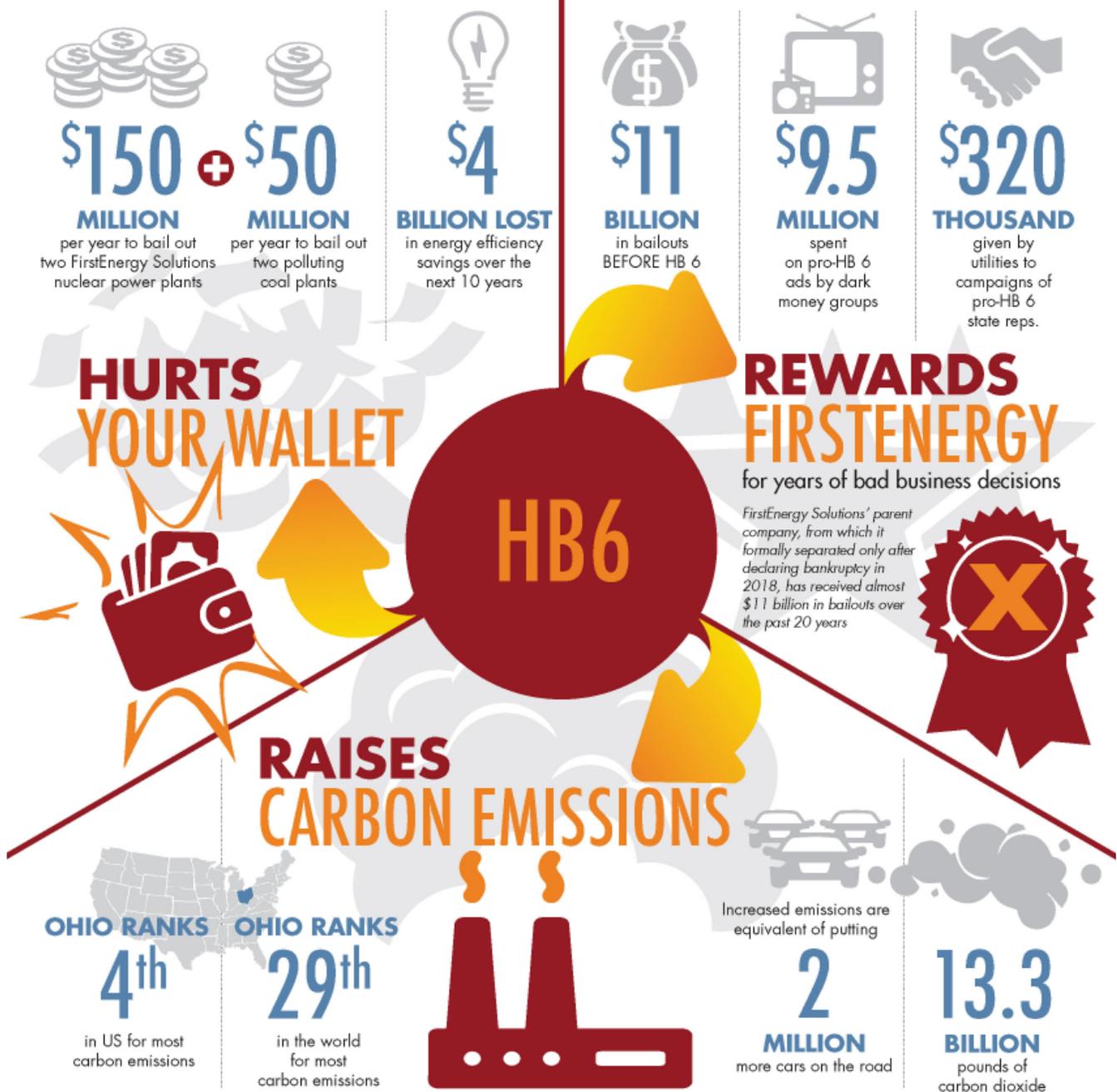
At Ohio Citizen Action, we already know you are the expert on what's best for you and your family. You also have the power to make the change you want to see in the world, whether that means your energy future or the makeup of your legislature. It's our job and our pleasure to help you use your expertise and power to help yourself, your family and all of Ohio. We're extremely grateful to our 30,000 members whose contributions and actions help us hold government and corporate decision makers accountable. And make no mistake, after losing at the legislature on House Bill 6 we haven't given up on accelerating the inevitable transition to renewable energy – far from it. We're just changing the venue of the fight.

See you at the grassroots!

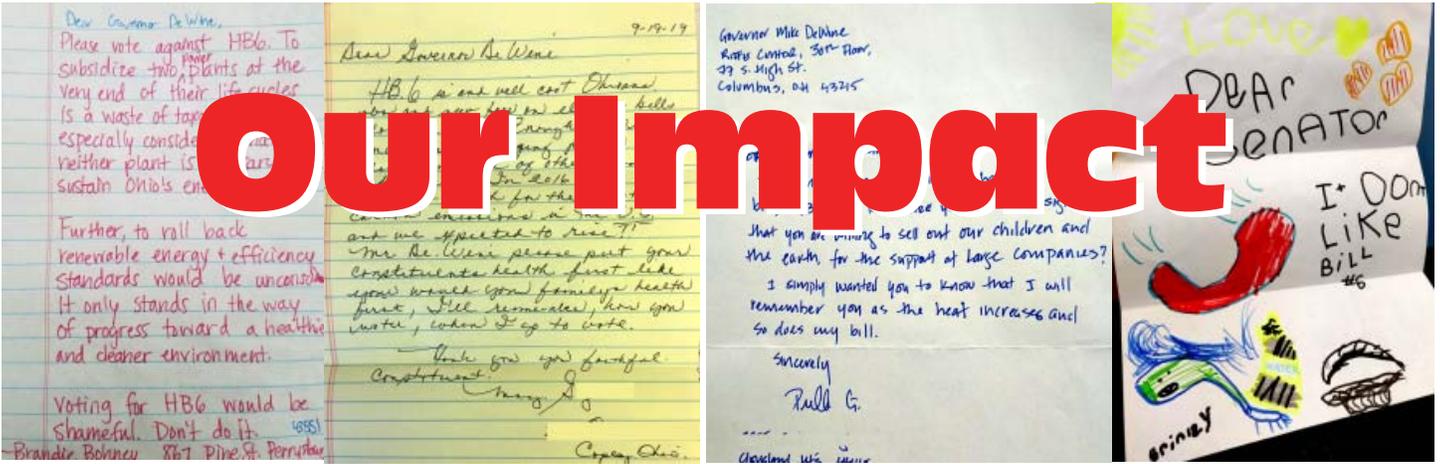


The Impact of Ohio House Bill 6

On July 23, 2019, Ohio House Bill 6 (HB 6) was signed into law with support from both Republicans and Democrats. They supported the bill approving higher electric bills to bail out two aging nuclear power plants and two coal plants – one that's in Indiana.



For most of the year, we worked to stop House Bill 6 from passing. From beginning to end, we played a key role in raising public awareness of the bill, countering confusion generated by our opposition and involving people in the process of government. In April, we launched the Ohio Consumers Power Alliance project to highlight the consumer voice in our energy battles. We also identified, prepared and turned out 14 of 34 witnesses for the very first hearing on the bill. In May, we held a rally and “bailout bake sale” at the FirstEnergy Shareholders meeting in Akron. In June the “pulled pork tour” brought out 100 people from Cincinnati, Bowling Green and Medina to protest FirstEnergy breaking customers’ piggy banks with the help of a giant, inflatable pig. And after the bill’s passage, we helped connect citizens with opportunities to sign a petition to repeal the bill by holding events and by circulating petitions for the final week. Perhaps most important, through our field, phone and digital outreach we presented the facts, dispelled misinformation and provided opportunities to engage.



Our Impact

What makes Ohio Citizen Action unique among groups working to transition Ohio toward an affordable, safe, clean energy future is our ability to reach out to Ohioans for one-on-one conversations. Door-to-door and on the phone we inform and engage people to work together in the public interest. In 2019, we worked on two different initiatives: opposing House Bill 6, the nuclear and coal bailout that also dismantled existing renewable energy and efficiency programs; and promoting a fix of the “wind setback” problem that’s stalled large-scale wind development in our state since 2015. Here’s how we did:

field canvass

118,516 doors knocked on

60,406 contacts

27,228 signatures of support for our clean energy goals

6,331 members signed up



HB6
484 calls to Governor DeWine

860 letters and kids’ drawings to Governor DeWine

6,502 calls to lawmakers

4,224 letters and kids’ drawings to lawmakers

phone canvass

13,289 contacts

3,004 contributions

4,514 patch-through calls to decision makers

wind setbacks

3,227 letters and drawings to lawmakers

2,518 calls to lawmakers

Government Accountability

In 2019 we did quite a lot of work to call out conflict-of-interest and bad faith dealing by government officials.

Early in the year, we began hearing rumors that a long-time lobbyist and general counsel for the industrial energy users of Ohio was being considered by the PUCO Nominating Council to fill a vacancy on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. His name is Sam Randazzo. By the time the Council voted to include Randazzo among four recommended nominees, we had issued a report opposing his appointment. The seven-page report, available online at <https://www.ohiocitizen.org/ohioans-deserve-an-end-to-puco-shill-game>



argued that the Council’s origins required them to seek balance among competing interests, that utilities’ interests were already well-served by current PUCO commissioners and that Mr. Randazzo would vote reliably to favor utilities and fossil fuel interests. By October, Mr. Randazzo had removed all doubt about his intent, when he pulled final approval for the long-anticipated Nestlewood Solar Farm in Southwest Ohio.

During the House Bill 6 campaign, we called-out two committee chairs who made public statements revealing their anti-renewable or anti-consumer biases. Rep. Dick Stein (R-Norwalk), Chair of the House Subcommittee on Energy Generation admonished witnesses not to “bash” particular forms of energy, despite having himself bashed wind power in an op-ed for the Norwalk Reflector. Similarly, Rep. Nino Vitale (R-Urbana), Chair of the House Energy & Natural Resources Committee dismissed and disparaged low-income families needing energy efficiency assistance, then followed up by withholding information from his Democratic colleagues and refusing to allow them to question

witnesses in the hearing room. In both cases, we wrote letters asking that they be removed from their leadership positions for gamesmanship, bad-faith and bad judgement.

Also during the campaign, when false and inflammatory mail and ads appeared urging Ohioans not to sign referendum petitions and “blockers” were hired to interfere with referendum petitioning, we publicly called on Governor DeWine and lawmakers to speak out. Not one of them did so, but instead allowed interference with the democratic process and subversion of the will of voters. We also filed a cease-and desist letter with Ohioans for Energy Security, in order to protect our field canvassers who might be mistaken for petitioners and attacked by fearful homeowners confused by the group’s ads.



After votes in both houses and after House Bill 6 had passed, we took a leading role to ensure Ohioans knew how their lawmakers voted. Besides posting the voting records on our website <https://www.ohiocitizen.org> how did your legislator vote on hb6 , we ran radio and Facebook ads in select districts, including that of Rep. Terrence Upchurch (D-Cleveland), who was one of a handful of Democrats who voted for the bailout, twice. We also field canvassed in Rep. Upchurch’s district and the districts of two of his pro-bailout Democratic colleagues, surveying constituents about their knowledge of the bill and how their lawmakers voted. What we learned reinforced our understanding of the gap between what people want and how their lawmakers vote. It also informed our approach for 2020.

Our Organization



Coinciding with the introduction of House Bill 6, we started the Ohio Consumers Power Alliance, a project of our research and education affiliate Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund. In an early display of the power we were up against, we were forced to abandon our first choice name- Ohio Consumers Energy Alliance- when we received a cease-and-desist letter from utility, nuclear and fossil fuel front group the Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA). The letter claimed our name confused Ohioans and CEA allies. It arrived two days after we launched the project and rented a three-story electronic billboard across from the capital building in Columbus. The bad news turned out to be good luck however, as we easily and quickly changed the name and received far more notice of our launch, including a story on the national AP wire.



Hannah Spring

We welcomed three new people to our core team this year, saw a couple promotions and gave a heartfelt farewell to a loyal comrade.

Hannah Spring joined us in February as our Field Canvass Director in Cleveland. Our first new field director in five years, Hannah came to us from our friends at Clean Water Action in Lansing, MI and had a very successful year, considerably exceeding our expectations for a first-year director.

Hannah replaced Jessica Smith-Szabo, who was promoted after successfully leading the field canvass since 2014. Jessica provided key support on the House Bill 6 campaign as Special Projects Director and later in the year assumed additional duties as Assistant to the Finance Director.

Beth Havens joined the Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund board in August. Beth is an alum, having served as office manager in our Columbus office from 1995-97 and currently works as a Senior Prospect Researcher at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. She has decades of development experience and says she looks forward to applying it to help OCA get the job done.



Beth Havens



Brad Holmes

Also in August, Brad Holmes was promoted to Phone Canvass Director, after first joining the staff as a field canvasser in 2018, but quickly moving to the phones. Brad is a 2018 graduate of Bowling Green University where he earned an undergraduate education in Environmental Policy, Ethics, and Sociology.



Stephen Gabor

Brad replaced long-time Phone Canvass Director Stephen Gabor, who in more than fifteen years with the organization transformed the phone canvass from a department primarily focused on fundraising to a potent organizing powerhouse. In his new role as Membership Director, Stephen looks forward to working more with volunteers and developing the major donor program.



Anastazia Vanisko

We promoted Anastazia Vanisko to full-time Cleveland Program Director. Anastazia had been filling the position part-time while also field canvassing before assuming her full-time role. She graduated from Case Western Reserve University in 2017, with a BA in political science and worked on campaigns against fixed rate increases and gutting Ohio's renewable energy and energy efficiency standards. She also has volunteered on campaigns for worker rights and immigrant rights.



This spring, we were able to replace the last of our aging fleet of vehicles. Our field staff now travel to communities throughout Ohio in safe, fully-functional (and adequately climate-controlled) vehicles built in the last decade. This may not sound like news, but it's a huge deal to all of us.



Tim Wrightsman

Finally, in December we said goodbye to Tim Wrightsman, who retired from our Finance Department after 20 years. Tim had planned to retire earlier, but put the needs of the organization first and stayed on until we could hire his replacement. Tim's loyalty, generosity and attention to detail will truly be missed.

2019 BOARD AND STAFF



Board members at their 2019 retreat (L-R): Dick Wittberg, Matt Currie, Anne Wise, Tommy Ferguson, Carla Walker, Heather Zoller, Beth Havens, Ann Knotek and Josh Sands. Not pictured: Bob Park and Brooke Smith.

Ohio Citizen Action Board: Thomas Gregory Ferguson, Ann Knotek, Joshua Sands, Carla Walker, Anne Wise, M.D., Dick Wittberg (President).

Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund Board: Matthew Currie, Beth Havens, Robert Park, Brooke Smith, Heather Zoller (President). Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund is the 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of Ohio Citizen Action. It's Executive Director is Melissa English.



Senior Staff: Rachael Belz (Executive Director); Melissa English (Deputy Director); Lynn Scheerhorn (Financial Director); Jessica Smith-Szabo (Special Projects Manager/ Financial Assistant); Don Wolcott (Regional Canvass Director); Curt Moultime (Regional Field Canvass Director); Stephen Gabor (Membership Director); Anastazia Vanisko (Cleveland Program Director); Hannah Spring (Cleveland Field Canvass Director); Brad Holmes (Phone Canvass Director); Angela Oster (Digital Communications Director); Chris Young (Database Manager); Mark Biszantz (Membership Development Coordinator); Sunny Savron (Administrative and Digital Assistant).