



Statement of Brad Buschur
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Before the U.S. Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works

Hearing on “Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields Program”

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today on the Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields Program. I represent Groundwork Lawrence, where I am a Project Director responsible for leading the organization’s environmental improvement programs. Groundwork Lawrence is a community-based organization working to create a high quality built and natural environment by renovating existing parks, creating new recreational opportunities, and stewarding Lawrence's three rivers. We transform vacant and contaminated land into parks and green spaces to support healthy active lifestyles. We are part of a network of independent locally based Groundwork Trusts in twenty-one cities and eighteen states. Trusts are established with support from the National Park Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and local stakeholders. Groundwork Trusts deploy a collaborative, community-wide and people-centered approach in the development of greenspaces and the restoration of the environment in the city, ensuring all stakeholders are invested in the project.

I am speaking to you today, on behalf of Groundwork Lawrence, about the organization’s work in the City of Lawrence, Massachusetts. Located thirty miles north of Boston, Lawrence is

a planned industrial city founded in the early 1840s. Central to the city's rise as a center of textile and paper production is the construction of the Great Stone Dam along the Merrimack River which diverted water to the north and south canals to provide power to the mills along its banks. Lawrence quickly became known as the immigrant city—by 1910, ninety percent of the city's 80,000 residents were either first- or second-generation Americans, and the city had become the largest manufacturer of worsted woolen textiles in the world. However, by the end of World War II, deindustrialization was in full force as mill owners moved their capital and employment out of Lawrence to lower cost regions.

The challenges associated with Lawrence's deindustrialization are significant. Abandoned mills are impacted by polyaromatic hydrocarbons, petroleum, chlorinated solvents, arsenic, lead, PCBs, and cadmium. A wave of arson and abandonment in the 1980s left vacant housing lots potentially contaminated by lead and asbestos. Multiple trash incinerators formerly located in Lawrence have all been shuttered, but they left behind soils contaminated with dioxins from burning plastics and medical waste. The city's densely populated neighborhoods frequently abut industrial and commercial areas, exposing residents to contaminants by direct contact or by inhalation of vapors via migration from soil into indoor air. Many of Lawrence's contaminated properties are small and interspersed throughout residential areas and present potential risks to human health for the homes and businesses surrounding them. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection lists 332 identified sites with environmental constraints spread across Lawrence's seven square miles.

Today the city is an economic and cultural center of the Merrimack Valley with over 90,000 residents, 80% of whom are Latino. The city has benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars of private investment in the redevelopment of its historic mills that now provide market rate and

affordable homes for residents. Unlike many older urban centers, the city has a young and growing population, fueled by the influx of Caribbean immigrants who bring new energy, businesses, and dreams. In a city notorious for ethnic tensions, there is growing momentum behind the city's broad-based community revitalization efforts, a hard-working and entrepreneurial community, a high-functioning nonprofit sector, and renewed community vitality with the election of Mayor Brian DePeña who recently led a tour of five brownfields the city is targeting for remediation and re-use planning.

Since 1996, the City of Lawrence has received \$3.65M in EPA Brownfield Program funding. The city has successfully utilized these grants to bring forth substantial economic benefits including leveraging \$12 million in State and Federal funds and \$51 million in private funding to assess, cleanup, and redevelop complex industrial properties and the creation of more than two hundred construction jobs as well as an additional two hundred permanent jobs related to the Union Crossing project. Lawrence currently has two active Brownfield cleanup grants to support redevelopment of the largest remaining parcels in the city. The most challenging project is the Tombarello Site, a fourteen-acre former electronics recycling facility abutting residential properties and a school with extensive PCB contamination. The other project is the Merrimac Paper Site, comprised of twenty-seven interconnected dilapidated buildings encompassing over 1.3 million square feet. Built in 1866, the site has become a perennial fire hazard placing first responders and public health at risk. Both properties have benefited from actions taken by the EPA Brownfields Program prior to the city taking ownership through tax taking. EPA's Region I Emergency Planning and Response Branch undertook significant remedial actions to address imminent public health risks created by private property owners.

Groundwork Lawrence has been fortunate to support the city's efforts to reclaim brownfields to provide residents with access to recreational opportunities within neighborhoods where the poverty rate, income levels, and sensitive populations are drastically higher than the rest of the state. Central to this work is the creation of the Spicket River Greenway. Over twelve years, Groundwork and the city created six new riverfront parks and connected them with a 3.5 mile long shared-use path providing residents with close-to-home high-quality parks. EPA Brownfield Program funding supported remediation of four of the new parks by providing \$600,000 of the \$10,667,291 required to create these projects. Additionally, the Land & Water Conservation Fund and the Community Development Block Grant programs were vital federal programs supporting the creation of these spaces.

As this committee undertakes reauthorization of the Brownfields Program, Groundwork Lawrence recommends evaluating three areas of the program. The statutory limit placed on EPA's cleanup grants is \$500,000 per parcel which is a significant amount of money, but offsite disposal and transportation costs have increased dramatically over the past five years. Another item future legislation should address is making building demolition an eligible cleanup expense. Uncontrolled demolition of buildings through fire or neglect is often the source of environmental contamination placing public health and the environment at risk. Most importantly, future legislation should require strong community engagement to ensure all impacted residents have a strong voice in the redevelopment process of brownfields. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.