

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko

Hearing on “Back from the Brink: Restoring Brownfield Sites to Economic Engines”

February 15, 2022

I often say my district in upstate New York is at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. And with the construction of the Erie Canal, this region became an industrial center for our nation and a gateway toward western expansion.

All along these rivers, mill towns grew. They manufactured carpets, leather, textiles, and many other types of goods.

Many of these industries left these towns years ago, but the mill towns’ residents are still dealing with a legacy of contaminated land.

While this is just one district’s story, I know there are brownfields in every Congressional district across the country, an estimated 450,000 sites, found in both rural and urban communities.

And each site helps tell the story of that community’s economic past.

But today we need to examine how we can make these sites part of our districts’ economic futures.

Brownfields are often in good locations, along waterfronts or near existing transportation infrastructure.

They can be valuable if communities can obtain the resources to assess their risks and remediate them when it is required.

But this effort to turn a potential liability into an asset cannot happen on its own.

EPA has been a critical partner to local and state governments to provide resources for the assessment and cleanup of properties.

Since Congress first authorized the program in 2002, EPA’s Brownfields Program has resulted in the assessment of 34,000 properties and the restoration of nearly 144,000 acres of land.

These efforts have created 180,000 jobs and leveraged over \$34 billion— more than \$20 for each dollar spent by EPA.

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These remediations protect public health and the environment all while preparing properties to get back onto the local tax rolls.

With these sorts of results, it is no wonder that this program has enjoyed such strong bipartisan support.

I want to acknowledge Ranking Member McKinley, who led the effort to reauthorize the program in the House in 2018.

I was proud to partner with him, Chairman Pallone, and our former colleagues John Shimkus and Greg Walden on that legislation.

That reauthorization included important reforms that were widely supported by stakeholders.

Many of these reforms sought to provide grant recipients greater flexibility, especially by allowing more community-wide planning.

The reauthorization also allowed for more funding to go toward capacity building and technical assistance for small and disadvantaged communities.

We made it easier for non-profit stakeholders to get involved.

And we increased the maximum grant size to allow a wider range of projects to compete for funding, which is especially important for sites that are more expensive to remediate.

While we are working to understand all the impacts of the 2018 reforms, I believe the initial signs are very positive.

If this program has any negatives, it is that Congress has underfunded it year after year, resulting in many qualified applications being rejected because of insufficient EPA funding.

I hope that is about to change.

Local governments across the country should be thrilled that the bipartisan infrastructure law, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, included \$1.5 billion for the program over the next five years.

These additional funds will also have unique conditions, including no cost share requirements and higher grant limits to ensure more disadvantaged communities can access these funds and that costlier, more complex sites are able to be remediated.

These funds will make a huge difference to state and local governments, and I hope EPA will begin the process of getting these dollars out the door to deserving communities in the near future.

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It is critical that we build on this historic investment and continue to fund the program robustly through the annual appropriations process.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us this morning. I look forward to your testimonies to learn more about EPA's program, how it has done since the 2018 reauthorization, and its role in promoting economic redevelopment and environmental justice moving forward.

I hope we can work together to ensure EPA continues to play a critical role in these economic revitalization efforts.