

## House hears testimony on EPA Brownfields program

July 22, 2015

On July 22, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment heard testimony on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program and discussed potential improvements to the initiative. Nearly every representative at the hearing praised the program, adopted in 2002, for helping to clean polluted sites and spur revitalization in economically depressed areas.

According to the EPA, brownfield cleanups return an average of almost 18 dollars for each federal dollar spent. Citing this strong return on investment, committee Democrats encouraged more funding for the program. Many applicants must be turned down due to the program's limited capacity, and those that do meet the EPA's criteria may still not receive funding. Mathy Stanislaus, testifying on behalf of the EPA, advised Congress not to set fixed funding levels for site assessments but rather to leave the allocation of funds to individual communities.

Witnesses also discussed the problems facing urban and rural communities. Vernice Miller-Travis, Vice Chair of the Maryland Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities, said that urban revitalization can lead to higher property prices, which displace low-income communities. Paul Gruber of the National Ground Water Association urged heavier investment in protecting the groundwater resources of rural communities that become vulnerable to water contamination when businesses develop "greenfield" property instead of reusing brownfield parcels. Undeveloped greenfield land acts as a natural filter for surface water to drain into an aquifer. For this reason, pushing development onto new property can lead to well water contamination.

Sources: E&E News, House.gov

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