

GOP revives plan to ban China, Iran from buying most property in Ohio

By Anna Staver
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Ohio Republicans are pushing to ban “foreign adversaries” from buying land near critical infrastructure, citing national security risks like espionage or cyberattacks.

But one Northeast Ohio Democrat warns the proposal could also stop foreign born athletes and doctors working in Cleveland from buying homes.

“This is a safety issue for Ohioans,” said state Rep. Angela King, a Celina Republican, during Tuesday’s House Public Safety Committee hearing.

King is co-sponsoring [House Bill 1](#). The bill, much like [Senate Bill 88](#), would ban people and companies from countries on the federal foreign adversary list from buying property within 25 miles of Ohio’s critical infrastructure.

This would ban people from China, Cuba, Russia, North Korea, Venezuela and Iran from buying near:

- military bases
- water treatment plants
- electricity plants
- natural gas pipelines
- broadband infrastructure
- railroads
- dams

“Few if any areas of the state would not be within 25 miles of one or the other of these types of properties,” according to [analysis](#) by the Legislative Services Commission.

HB 1 would let current owners who fall into this camp keep what they have, but SB 88 would force them to sell at no more than the price they originally paid.

State Rep. Juanita Brent, a Cleveland Democrat, suggested that the bills could stop foreign born Cleveland Guardians players or Cleveland Clinic doctors from owning

homes in Ohio. She asked how the bills might impact “those here legally on visas or green cards. Is there any willingness to work with them?”

“This does not impact leases, so they can rent,” King replied.

The Guardians declined to comment, but King noted that many of these countries don’t allow Americans to own property.

“They have the option to become a citizen or a dual citizen if they want to purchase,” King said.

Pushing China out

Ohio isn’t the only state looking to restrict foreign land ownership.

In 2023, 10 states--including Ohio-- restricted foreign farmland ownership, according to the [National Agricultural Law Center](#).

Some even ordered companies to sell.

Arkansas told Northrup King Seed Co., a subsidiary of Syngenta that’s held by ChemChina, to [divest from 160 acres](#) in October 2023.

In Ohio, Capchem USA might have to sell its [battery chemicals production base](#) in Lawrence County if SB 88 passes.

It’s a \$75 million investment by the [Chinese owned company](#) that promises to create 65 jobs.

Ohio did ban foreigners from owning farmland in the state’s last two-year operating budget. Lawmakers tried to include a 25-mile radius around military bases but Gov. Mike DeWine vetoed it, citing “unintended economic development consequences.”

DeWine’s office said it’s premature to comment on these new proposals.

State Rep. Cecil Thomas, a Cincinnati Democrat, asked King whether a smaller radius around these facilities might be a fair compromise. Indiana, for example, imposed a 10 mile limit.

He also worried about whether China might retaliate against Ohio farmers and stop buying their crops.

“I think there needs to be more discussion,” he said.

Democrats don’t necessarily oppose the idea behind HB 1 and SB 88, though.

“I’m all about national security. I think it’s a reasonable thing to do,” said state Rep. Sean Brennan, a Parma Democrat.

His only concern was whether countries like Ukraine could one day find themselves on the U.S. foreign adversary list.

How much land do foreigners own?

This isn’t a simple question to answer.

According to the latest data from the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), foreign investors and companies own more than about 1.8% of all land in the U.S. and 3.1% of all privately held agricultural land.

The challenge for the federal government and for Ohio is that purchases can be hidden behind shell companies and straw buyers.

“We know we will not be able to track every parcel,” King said.

Congress [looked at updating](#) the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act last year.

In Ohio, HB 1 would create a document buyers sign swearing that they aren’t banned from buying property, and it gives local law enforcement authority to investigate whether the buyer is lying.

“If we find out afterwards,” King said. “We have that record.”