

**Testimony of Chris Wells, Executive Director,
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality,
& President, Environmental Council of the States,
to the U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce,
Subcommittee on Environment,
Addressing *Ready for Reuse: Legislative Proposals to
Unleash the Potential of America's Brownfields Sites*
March 4, 2026**

Summary

The EPA Brownfields Program, including CERCLA Sections 128(a) and 104(k), is one of the most consistently successful federal programs in existence. For over two decades, it has delivered measurable environmental, economic, and community benefits nationwide.

State and tribal programs are at the core of that success. Federal funding supports state response programs that provide technical assistance, liability protection, assessments, cleanups, and redevelopment guidance — particularly for small and rural communities that lack the capacity to manage complex federal grants. By pairing federal resources with state-level implementation, communities receive both funding and practical expertise to move projects forward.

In Mississippi alone:

- Seventy EPA 104(k) grants totaling \$29,712,760 have leveraged over \$300 million in private investment, created more than 800 jobs, and returned over 700 properties to productive use.
- MDEQ has received \$21,718,565 in Section 128(a) funding, including Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) supplemental funds.
- Since 2023, MDEQ's Targeted Brownfield Assessment program has assessed 82 sites across 550 acres, leveraging more than \$3 million in brownfield funding and opening the door for \$30–\$60 million in expected investment and 300-600 jobs in very small communities.

Projects such as the Fry Building in Natchez (population approximately 14,500) demonstrate cradle-to-rebirth success made possible through federal assessment, cleanup, and revolving loan fund grants, leveraging public and private investment.

The federal program works because it combines liability protection, technical oversight, and strong federal–state partnership, directly to brownfield communities. The program works, and therefore, it does not need to be reinvented — it needs to be renewed and strengthened.

When IIJA supplemental funding expires in 2026, Congress should maintain Section 128(a) funding at a level commensurate with what was made available through that supplemental funding.

Reauthorization should preserve what works, reinforce state partnership, and ensure small and underserved communities are not left behind.