

Chairman Manning, vice-chair Bill Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the Commerce and Labor committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 229. I would like to also to thank Representative Adam Miller for his joint sponsorship of this legislation.

Although the 1968 Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, or disability, the truth is that discrimination continues to happen, oftentimes affecting economically disadvantaged minorities.

Public housing has shifted over the years from unit based to voucher based. The use of vouchers was designed so a new form of discrimination otherwise known as redlining, would be eliminated as voucher recipients could find housing in communities of their choice—and it's happening here in Ohio.

House Bill 229 would prohibit landlords from discriminating against tenants who utilize the federal governments Housing Choice Voucher Program. This bill simply would prohibit landlords from discrimination against tenants based on form of payment—particularly the use of federal vouchers for rent. Fifteen states have passed similar laws. This legislation will help prevent a new form modern day redlining and work to create true multi-income, multi-cultural communities.

In Ohio, approximately 34% of households rent their homes, and over 229,000 Ohio households use a federal housing voucher to help pay the rent. The goals of the Housing Choice Voucher program, often referred to as Section 8, is to eliminate the concentration of poverty and to provide households with low incomes access to higher-opportunity neighborhoods.

However, in most of Ohio, landlords can legally refuse to accept vouchers, which means that these households end up clustered in areas with high poverty, high crime, and low educational opportunities. In Cuyahoga County, 90% of households using vouchers are concentrated in neighborhoods with minimal resources. In Ohio, the most frequently reported barrier to finding housing is landlord refusal of vouchers.

A Scholars Strategy Network of Northeast Ohio study found that in Cuyahoga County, some 16% of Craigslist rental listings over a three-month period in summer 2018 contained such language. Finding rental housing is far more difficult for families using vouchers to pay rent. Sometimes, advertisements for rental properties contain explicit language stating the landlord does not accept vouchers.

Income discrimination is real and it's frequent in Ohio. The few non-discrimination laws we have at the municipal level are not sufficient to protect tenants. The decision to exclude voucher holders from renting properties often disproportionately harms individuals in other protected classes, such as race, disability, or familial status.

For example, 90% of those who use vouchers in Cuyahoga County are African American. Across Ohio, over 28% of people receiving federal rental assistance are adults with disabilities, 80% are women, and 38% are households with children.

According to the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, 14 states have some form of source of income non-discrimination law, and numerous other counties and cities in the U.S. have similar legislation. Six cities in Ohio have these protections: Cincinnati, Linndale, South Euclid, University Heights, Warrensville Heights, and Wickliffe. This covers only a tiny fraction of the State and Ohio's renter's population. Inconsistent protections throughout the state likely limit the effectiveness of all non-discrimination policies, whereas a state-wide ban on source income discrimination would provide the economies of scale and geographic consistency necessary to enforce the law.

I believe that most landlords are stepping up and doing the right thing. However, what HB 229 does is codifies common sense: you shouldn't be able to deny someone because they are getting some help. The whole movement to vouchers was aimed at inclusion and choice, this bill ensures that.

Chairman Manning and the members of the Commerce and Labor committee, I thank you for allowing me to give testimony, and I thank you for consideration of House Bill 425.