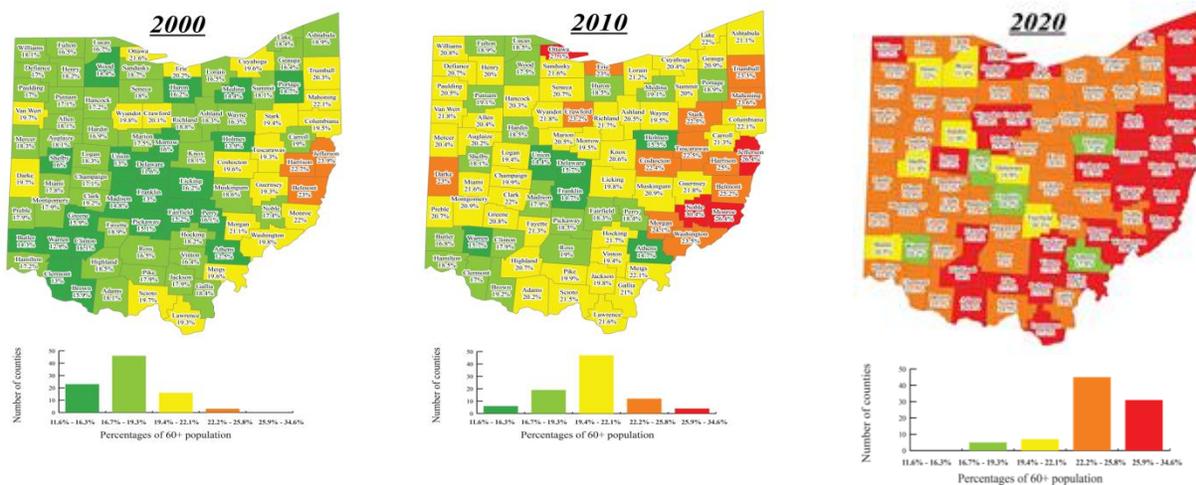


Senate Finance Committee Written Testimony of National Church Residences Megan Kelley, Vice President of Public Policy

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on behalf of National Church Residences and the Home Matters to Ohio Coalition regarding Ohio’s operating budget and the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF). National Church Residences is the nation’s largest nonprofit provider of affordable senior housing in the country, headquartered in Central Ohio. In Ohio, we own and/or operate close to 100 affordable housing communities, housing almost 6,700 Ohioans. On behalf of the thousands of your Ohio constituents that call a National Church Residences’ community home, we write today to urge you to support increased funding for the OHTF in this budget. Ohio is experiencing a critical shortage of safe, decent, and affordable housing, which is particularly acute for Ohio’s most vulnerable citizens, and the OHTF is an important part of addressing this need.

HOUSING CRISIS: OHIO’S OLDER ADULTS

Older adults between the ages of 65-74 years old are now the fastest-growing age group in the country.¹ Ohio is no exception – the below graphs demonstrate the staggering pace at which Ohio’s senior demographic is growing:



While this growth over the past 20 years is dramatic, this demographic is expected to further double in the coming twenty years. This demographic shift is not itself necessarily troubling; however, the rate of poverty among older adults is growing at **three times** the rate of this population growth, which has serious implications and signals a looming crisis. Older adults today are, on average, poorer than preceding generations, with less saved for retirement and long term care, more debt, and fewer family caregivers and support systems to sustain them into retirement years. Referred to as a “coming storm of broke elderly,” a recent study was able to

¹ https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard_JCHS_State_of_the_Nations_Housing_2018.pdf

identify that the rate of citizens over the age of 65 who are now filing for bankruptcy increased about 204% from 1991 to 2016.²

At the same time, an overwhelming **54% of renter households age 65 and over have been identified as “rent burdened,”** meaning they pay 30% or more of their incomes on housing costs, leaving little income leftover to pay for nutritious food, healthcare, prescription medications, and other basic necessities. This comes at a time when federal housing assistance reaches only a fraction (1 in 3 seniors) of the large and growing number of low-income households in need.

The convergence of these factors is what some call “the Senior Tsunami.” It translates into unprecedented need for safe, affordable, and service-enriched rental housing options specifically designed to allow older adults to safely age in place and avoid premature admission into costly nursing homes, hospitals, and other healthcare settings. In fact, investments in affordable housing have specifically been identified as a key strategy for Ohio to reduce spending on costly sick care later in life.³ The Health Policy Institute of Ohio notes that Ohio’s healthcare spending is mostly on costly downstream care to treat health problems, largely because of many missed upstream opportunities, including affordable housing, to prevent or better manage injury, illness and disability for thousands of Ohioans. **Housing is a proven solution to impact better health outcomes and bend the curve of ballooning healthcare spending for the most vulnerable Ohioans.**

At National Church Residences, we see waiting lists **up to four years long** at most of our Ohio subsidized properties. A recent poll of Ohio’s nonprofit senior housing providers found approximately 17 low-income seniors on a waiting list for every 1 unit of affordable housing – and that ratio is closer to 30-1 in some markets. Many of Ohio’s frail and vulnerably elderly simply do not have that long to wait for a home they can afford. Just recently we learned of an elderly veteran living in his car in the parking lot of a grocery store down the street from the property where he had been on the waiting list for several years. This is just one example to highlight the fact that, without more affordable homes, the very real choice for many older Ohioans is homelessness or Medicaid-funded nursing homes, further demonstrated by the attached Columbus Dispatch Article (“More older people among homeless in Columbus”).

OHIO HOUSING TRUST FUND: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Just when we need it the most, federal resources for the development and preservation of affordable housing are increasingly scarce and in jeopardy, leaving it to state and local communities to bridge the gap to meet this quickly growing and foundational need. The Housing Development Assistance Program (HDAP), funded by the OHTF and administered by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA), is a foremost source of financing for affordable housing development in Ohio. However, in recent years the OHTF has been decimated by decreased recording fee revenue, an antiquated fee structure, and inflation, meaning that **the purchasing**

² <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/why-are-so-many-americans-over-65-declaring-bankruptcy-2018-11-06>

³ https://www.healthpolicyohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019HealthValueDashboard_ExecutiveSummaryNumbered.pdf

power of today's OHTF is 50% - 60% less than when it was created in 2003. Because of this, not only are we unable to produce enough affordable housing to meet the growing need, but we also leave federal resources on the table without the leveraging power of additional OHTF funds.

HOMELESS SERVICES IN PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

In addition to affordable senior housing, National Church Residences also operates Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). These communities provide safe, stable and affordable housing, coupled with supportive services, to formerly homeless and disabled adults. It is the supportive services aspect of this housing model that is truly transformative, and which gives our PSH residents the tools they need to achieve stability, wellness, and self-sufficiency. National Church Residences relies heavily on the support of the OHTF to fund services, including but not limited to employment training, health and wellness, recovery support, crisis intervention, and case management.

PSH properties typically operate on a shoestring budget. The OHTF has made it possible for affordable housing providers to combat chronic homelessness across the state, particularly among homeless veterans. That said, this progress could be quickly undone – and PSH development and operations placed in jeopardy – should OHTF support continue to decline.

CONCLUSION

Affordable housing is arguably the most critical social determinant of health, and an upstream solution to some of Ohio's most pressing policy and budgetary concerns, including things like infant mortality, addiction, homelessness among children and veterans, and ballooning healthcare spending for our growing aging population. The Ohio Housing Trust Fund is an opportunity for Ohio to invest in proactive, evidence-based solutions now to avoid greater crisis later, and we respectfully ask for your support of increased funding.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions at mkelley@nationalchurchresidences.org or (614) 273-3763.

Respectfully submitted,

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The Columbus Dispatch

More older people among homeless in Columbus

By Encarnacion Pyle

The Columbus Dispatch

Posted Mar 5, 2017 at 5:00 AM

Updated Mar 5, 2017 at 5:00 AM

Tim Madison always relished the physical labor of rehabbing houses. But decades of hard work took a toll on his body, and after two heart attacks and several other health problems, Madison had to leave construction and stop working altogether.

Within months, the 55-year-old East Side man had drained his savings and lost his apartment, and he found himself bouncing between the homes of a sister and brother.

In August, he entered Faith Mission, a men's homeless shelter on 8th Avenue in Columbus, because he didn't want to be a burden on his family any longer.

"One day you have a good job, money in the bank and your health, and within months, you have nothing," he said. "I never thought in a million years I would have to go to a shelter."

Madison was just as surprised by the number of people at the shelter older than he is. "There were walkers, canes and wheelchairs everywhere and people suffering from chronic illnesses. It was eye-opening and unexpected," he said.

During the six months he was there, he had a third heart attack and learned he has diabetes.

The homeless in America, like the rest of its citizens, are getting grayer.

In 2012, 12 percent of the males using Columbus shelters and 8 percent of the females were 56 or older, said Michelle Heritage, executive director of the Community Shelter Board. This year, 18 percent of men and 12 percent of women are in that age range.

Nationwide, about half of the homeless are 50 or older. And the number of older homeless adults is projected to double to 95,000 by 2050, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Experts project that the number of older homeless people will grow as the housing and job markets tighten and the number of senior citizens increases. By 2050, an estimated 89 million people will be 65 or older, according to U.S. Census Bureau projections.

Homelessness can lead to chronic illnesses, geriatric conditions and even premature death, experts say. The average life span of a person living on the street is 64; for someone with housing, it's 80.

"As a community, we will need to think about and plan for what that may mean for those who may fall into homelessness," Heritage said.

Like their younger counterparts, older homeless adults are frequent users of emergency and other health-care services, and each one can cost taxpayers as much as \$50,000 a year, according to former HUD Secretary Mel Martinez, who says ending senior homelessness should be a national priority.

"Because of their limited incomes, many older adults are just a crisis away from homelessness, and all it takes is a divorce, fall, illness or financial setback to pull the rug from under their feet," said Laura Imbrock, a caseworker with Mount Carmel Health System's mobile-coach and street-medicine program. Alcohol abuse, mental-health issues or the onset of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also can play a role.

Although some people are chronically homeless and grow into their senior years without stable housing, a growing number of homeless are older adults experiencing it for the first time, experts say. The scarcity of affordable housing, financial scars from evictions and foreclosures, and long waiting lists for subsidized housing make it even harder for many older adults to start over, the experts say.

"People can easily wait one to two years for low-income senior housing to open up, and many seniors don't have that long to just wait it out," said Patty Callahan, an information and assistance coordinator for the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging.

Even an apartment priced at \$550 a month, which many people would consider a bargain in Columbus, would be unaffordable for many seniors living on \$744 a month in Supplemental Security Income, a program set up to help older people and the disabled, experts say.

Lora Tinsley, 58, of the West Side, said she lost her home after her husband went to jail a year ago on a domestic-violence conviction. After losing a job as a trucking dispatcher, she couldn't keep up on rent and ended up staying with friends, she said. She's now at the Van Buren family shelter in Franklinton, where she has lived on and off since last March.

Despite feeling helpless, Tinsley refuses to be hopeless.

"Failure is not an option," she said. "I want to work again, and I will have a home again."

New programs have been created to help get vulnerable homeless people, including the elderly, back on their feet.

Mount Carmel, for example, created a program in which newly housed people who have recently been homeless get together with community volunteers each month and share a meal, participate in activities and build friendships.

The Community Shelter Board, PrimaryOne Health and the YMCA teamed up last year to offer six medical beds at the Van Buren shelter as a respite center for people just out of the hospital. The center provides transitional housing, meals and case management in addition to short-term medical care to patients whose chronic health problems often are exacerbated by living on the street or in shelters. The goal is to reduce hospital readmissions and get people ongoing health care.

Thirty-eight people, including five who are older than 60, received extra attention until they could care for themselves.

Unfortunately, 90 people were turned away because they didn't meet the qualifications, highlighting the great need, said Lori Corey, the program coordinator. To qualify, people have to come directly from the hospital and have been homeless before they were treated at the hospital.

“There are just not enough resources to help everyone,” Corey said.

After six months at the Faith Mission, Madison was lucky enough to get an apartment at Commons at Grant Downtown, one of several supportive housing developments created by National Church Residences to help formerly homeless and disabled adults work their way to independence.

“Becoming homeless was the hardest thing that has ever happened to me, but it ended up being a blessing in disguise,” Madison said.

Madison was paired with a social worker, recently started receiving disability benefits and is working with his church to provide outreach ministry to help others experiencing tough times.

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