



**Written Testimony Submitted by the Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Re: HB282's Criminalization of Rental Property Lease Violations**

The Honorable Chairman Dever, Vice Chairman Sprague, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives, Committee on Financial Institutions, Housing and Urban Development, please accept this testimony related to House Bill 282, which is offered on behalf of CSH, a non-profit organization that works to expand housing opportunities for vulnerable populations across the state.

CSH has worked in partnership with Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services, local Mental Health and Recovery Boards, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, and numerous housing and service providers across the state for approximately 15 years to facilitate the provision of affordable housing with intensive supports to people living with mental illness, addictions, developmental disabilities, and chronic illnesses.

We are writing in opposition to HB 282's Criminalization of Rental Property Lease Violations and asking for you to reject this damaging legislation for the following reasons:

*Access to affordable housing is already very difficult; further restrictions for vulnerable people will cause unintended consequences including increases in homelessness and increased costs to the public safety net.*

Affordable housing remains out of reach for the majority of extremely low-income individuals with disabilities in Ohio. We estimate there is currently a gap of approximately 700,000 units in the state. Compounding the availability issue, many communities in the state have low vacancy rates and can be selective in approving tenants for the housing that does exist. This means that for people who are recovering from addiction and mental illness, and who often have criminal histories as a result of these disabling conditions, it is very difficult to access housing in the community. Too many individuals and families that can't access affordable housing become homeless each year. Yet research tells us that housing stability is a primary path to recovery, and housing instability prolongs and exacerbates health and behavioral health issues, resulting in excessive costs to the publicly-funded safety net. (Tsemberis, et al American Journal of Public Health, 2004; Larimer et al Journal of the American Medical Association, 2009.)

*Current penalties are sufficient and routinely enforced.*

Under current law, damage to property is a lease violation that will result in eviction. This is a significant penalty that is not taken lightly. One-fifth of renters in Cincinnati experience evictions, which pushes these individuals further and further into substandard housing and unsafe conditions (Cincinnati Enquirer, October 26, 2017). Eviction is a traumatic event in and of itself with long-term consequences. (Desmond, et al, How Housing Matters September 17, 2015.) There is no need to exacerbate this already serious problem by adding criminal penalties and putting affordable housing further out of reach for too many vulnerable people, as HB282 would do.

*Criminalization of civil matters exacerbates overcrowding of people who are not a risk to society in jails*

In cases when someone with a behavioral health disorder causes damage to their apartment, they should be connected to treatment and services, not criminal penalties. Our jails are too often the primary intervention for people with behavioral health issues, and HB282 would make this problem even worse.

*Supportive Housing is an effective alternative to incarceration*

CSH manages programs that house four hundred people across the state each year in supportive housing as they exit prison facing homelessness and mental illness and addiction. According to a study of the program by the Urban Institute, fewer than 10% of these individuals return to prison and the vast majority participate in behavioral health services offered by the program. This is a more humane and cost-effective approach to addressing untreated mental illness and addiction and we urge the committee to consider expanding supportive housing rather than pushing more vulnerable people into homelessness and jails.

We ask that you reject this damaging legislation and instead, focus on improving access to and availability of supportive housing.

Respectfully submitted,  
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