

**Ohio House of Representatives
Financial Institutions, Housing, and Urban Development
Testimony of Peggy Rice, President
Ohio Housing Authorities Conference
November 28, 2017**

Chairman Dever, Vice Chair Sprague and Ranking Member Smith, I am Peggy Rice, President of the Ohio Housing Authorities Conference or OHAC. I also serve as the Executive Director of the Portsmouth Metropolitan Housing Authority serving Scioto County. Thank you for allowing me to convey the concerns of OHAC regarding HB282.

OHAC is a statewide trade association of Ohio's 75 Public Housing Authorities. OHAC's mission is to foster and promote affordable housing in the state of Ohio through: education and training of its members and the public; exchange of information and concerns; mutual support and collaborative efforts. OHAC was established in 1939, and has a long history of professional service to the affordable housing industry. Strong leadership and advocacy among OHAC members has been a real catalyst for quality, affordable housing throughout the cities, towns and villages of Ohio. Housing authorities assist participants in developing the skills and self-confidence needed to become self-sufficient. Some housing authorities assist families with additional needs including: child care, education, transportation, job training, credit counseling, utility assistance and other needed services.

As you may know, Housing Authorities are political sub-divisions of the State of Ohio organized to administer Federal funds received from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through annual contracts and other housing initiatives. Due to administering federal funds, HUD provides the policy and guidelines for the administration and eligibility of the programs administered by the Housing Authorities.

Our concern with HB282 lies within lines 144-154; the section of the bill that prohibits Housing Authorities from providing housing assistance to any person convicted of criminal mischief relating to residential rental property damage. As I mentioned above, many of our programs are structured and driven by HUD policy and regulation, which means our ability to screen potential recipients of assistance is limited to the criteria set forth by HUD. In recent years, HUD policy has guided Housing Authorities to be less stringent in screening criteria in an effort to achieve the core mission of providing safe, affordable housing to all. We have serious apprehension HB282 would put us at odds with HUD policies and regulations.

Members of OHAC have brought forward many scenarios of how they believe the inclusion of lines 144-154 could be detrimental to the core mission of HUD and Housing Authorities. One would be, a veteran who has returned from an active theater and suffers from PTSD, but is trying to manage his symptoms himself; he resides in a private investor's rental unit until he has a full PTSD flashback. During his flashback he damages the rental unit, law enforcement is called, and he is arrested for criminal mischief; while dealing with his criminal charges, he starts receiving intensive treatment for his PTSD. His treatment goes well and he starts trying to get back on his feet, but now needs housing assistance.

Under this bill, Housing Authorities would not be able to provide this veteran any assistance with his housing. This is just one scenario that could turn into a real-life situation should this bill pass *As Introduced*.

The position I hold with OHAC has afforded me many opportunities. I participated on a planning committee to help develop the Ohio statewide plan to end homelessness and attended the Propel Ohio Collegiate Leadership Summit 2017. During the process of developing the statewide plan it was apparent that housing authorities would play an important role in addressing the issue within our State and our local communities. The Summit was a one-day conference to engage with student leaders from across the State and tackle issues related to childhood poverty, one of which is housing security.

The one thing that resonated with me during these two experiences is regardless of the situation, whether it is the veteran I mentioned earlier, the disabled or the child, housing is a basic need that has to be met. It has to be met in order to stabilize the individual, the family and the community where they live.

During the Interested Party meeting, OHAC and the proponent parties agreed to work together to address problems that our private investor partners are seeing across the state; and the proponents that participated indicated their top priority was the inclusion of residential rental property damaging in the criminal mischief charge. It is in our best interest to assure our private investor partners continue to participate in HUD programs. We need our partners, both public and private, in-order to administer successful programs and provide safe, affordable housing to those in-need, and we are still committed to sitting down with the proponents to see how we can address their concerns.

Housing authorities have faced decreased funding over the last decade. We realize that we are working with finite resources; however, we need the flexibility to work with all of our local partners to address the needs in our communities. We appreciate the intent of Rep. Hambley and others who wish to instill accountability in the use of public dollars, however, we do not believe the language contained in HB282 will be enforceable. We respectfully request lines 144-154 be removed from the bill.

Again, thank you for allowing me to convey our concerns, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.