



**Testimony before the House Finance Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources
Subcommittee**

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Thank you Chairman Thompson and members of the House Finance Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 49 and the critical importance of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. My name is Emily Lundgard and I am the State and Local Policy Director for Enterprise Community Partners. Enterprise is a national housing and community development non-profit. We provide capital investments, innovative programming, and policy solutions that support affordable homes connected to opportunity across the country and here in Ohio.

To date, Enterprise has invested over \$609 million in Ohio, creating over 14,700 affordable homes, and placed over \$80 million in New Markets Tax Credits in Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati. Through our program work in Cuyahoga County, Enterprise manages the Cuyahoga County Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition, the Cuyahoga County Pay for Success program, and the Housing First Initiative which I'll speak more about shortly. In sum, Enterprise has been around for over 30 years and we deeply understand the impact of affordable homes.

More than 19 million American families are housing insecure, meaning they are spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent and utilities. In Cuyahoga County more than 66,000 renter families are housing insecure. Across the state, nearly 1 in 4 renters living outside the top 3 metro areas are housing insecure. And children make up about one third of all housing insecure people in Ohio. Unfortunately, these numbers only continue to increase.

The primary and most significant resource for housing insecure families in our state is the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. The Trust Fund has a 25-year history of a proven structure that works, yet it has remained flat-funded while levels of housing insecurity rise. Not only is the need great, we know that when we do invest in homes, we are supporting the success of other state priorities including health and education.

Children who experience housing insecurity are more likely to drop out, repeat grades, perform poorly on tests, disengage in the classroom, and suffer from learning disabilities. When a child grows up in an unaffordable home, they are often forced to move frequently, which can lead to disruptions in school attendance and, ultimately, poorer school performance. Studies show that a single change in elementary schools results in a decrease in math and reading skills equivalent to a 4-month learning disadvantage.

Substandard and unstable housing is also linked to serious health conditions such as asthma, lead poisoning, food insecurity, chronic disease, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Decent housing is essential for children's health, including state efforts to lower infant mortality. When housing costs are high, families are forced to make toxic trade-offs with their limited budget.

At Enterprise, we talk about ‘Housing as a Vaccine.’ Without housing first, other interventions won’t work well. And we know this to be true. Children’s HealthWatch found that compared to their housing insecure peers, children in affordable housing have a 35 percent greater chance of being classified a ‘well’ child and a 28 percent lower risk of being seriously underweight.

In Oregon, Enterprise conducted studied Medicaid claims for 1,625 families who were able to find stable housing. The result: researchers found that costs to the health care system were lower after people moved into housing. Total Medicaid expenditures declined by 12 percent. Primary care visits increased by 20 percent. Emergency Room visits fell 18 percent.

We’ve seen similar results with an initiative we manage in Cuyahoga County called Housing First. Since 2006, Housing First has developed 710 apartments of permanent supportive housing for long-term homeless individuals and families. Housing First residents are the most vulnerable among us: they represent 20 of percent homeless population but use 70 percent of the resources; 78 percent have severe and persistent mental illness; 85 percent are struggling with addiction; 20 percent are veterans; and their average age is climbing, currently at 51 years. With the critical help of the Trust Fund, Housing First has been able to leverage \$115.3 million of investment in our neighborhoods, create over 70 jobs, and save our community countless dollars by keeping high utilizers out of the ER, out of our jails and, instead, in stable homes connected to services. Housing First residents have better health outcomes and many are able to begin earning income again. Most remarkably though, there is a less than 2 percent return to homelessness and a 78 percent reduction in long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County. The success of Housing First is not possible with the support from the Trust Fund.

Understanding the urgent need, Enterprise has joined the Home Matters to Ohio campaign to draw attention to the need to bolster the Trust Fund. Home Matters to Ohio has garnered support from nearly 400 companies and organizations – including Huntington Bank, Cleveland Clinic, Sisters of Charity Health System, FirstEnergy, Molina Healthcare, PNC, Fifth Third Bank, Nationwide Children’s Hospital, and many more.

We know that investments in home work. Expanding the Trust Fund will create a stable foundation for working families, individuals overcoming addiction, veterans returning home, seniors, and so many more. Beyond that, it has proven to produce a significant return on investment - leveraging other dollars into Ohio, lowering costs in other systems, and providing families economic opportunity.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to answering your questions.