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**Senate General Government & Agency Review Committee**

**Senate Bill 297 Sponsor Testimony**

**Senators Nickie Antonio Hearcel F. Craig**

**July 21, 2020**

Chair Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member O'Brien and Members of the Senate General Government & Agency Review Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on Senate Bill 297. This legislation will declare an emergency and require a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

On March 9, 2020, Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency in Ohio to keep Ohioans healthy and safe, preserve scarce PPE and provide relief to our hospital system and all workers. Now, Ohio families are feeling the devastating impacts of an economy struggling to recover. On July 16, 2020, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services reported that **more than 465,000** Ohioans were still unemployed. This number does not reflect the additional Ohioans who are unemployed but have not yet been able to file for unemployment or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. While the Federal CARES Act funding has certainly provided some relief, it has not lifted the burden of housing assistance nearly enough.

The issue of evictions at this time has also garnered attention from our judicial system, as Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor asked municipal courts, in March, to limit the amount of evictions throughout the state. Justice O'Connor made this recommendation, hoping that each court would take proper precautions and only hear cases that were time-sensitive or could be emergencies. This also ensured that any evictions necessary due to domestic violence protection orders could still occur.

We want to ensure that Ohioans are protected and that families have the ability to stay in their homes. This should always be our intention as public servants, but especially during a global pandemic unlike anything we've witnessed this century. This legislation will place a moratorium on eviction orders during the state of emergency declared due to Covid-19, while allowing an exception for cases of domestic violence. There will also be a moratorium on foreclosure actions and foreclosure sales during the state of emergency. SB 297 will require eviction and foreclosure actions filed within 60 days after the state of emergency and those that are filed for monetary default that occurred during the emergency, to be referred to mediation. Ohioans simply cannot wait for this legislation to be enacted, and that is why the emergency clause in SB 297 is critical.

The exemption for domestic violence protection orders is especially important, as we know that survivors who are living in these environments can be subject to more drastic and dangerous domestic violence during the Stay-At-Home/Stay Safe Ohio orders. If violence in the home previously existed, the added stressors of unemployment, health concerns and general uncertainty resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic could further exacerbate domestic violence. Ohioans living in this dangerous situation cannot, and should not, wait for the state of emergency to be over to receive protection and relief.

Across the nation, there is a foreseeable upcoming wave of evictions. The additional \$600 from the federal government for weekly unemployment assistance is expiring in days without a solution even on the horizon.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Ohio's Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are steadily on the rise again.<sup>2</sup> Many businesses are shutting down and too many Ohioans are still unable to find work. August rent and mortgages are quickly approaching, and the situation could not be more dire. Ohio families could be forced into worse living conditions or homelessness in the coming weeks. If this occurs, it will most definitely exacerbate the spread of Covid-19 in our communities.

Governor DeWine has asked Ohioans to stay safe at home. He has asked us to limit our exposure to this deadly virus by only leaving our homes when absolutely necessary. If people do not have a home to stay safe in, we will not be able to contain the spread. This legislation is vitally important to help Ohioans slow the spread of the virus and maintain stability within our economy.

Thank you Chair Schuring and Members of the committee for the opportunity to consider this legislation. We welcome any questions you might have at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2020/07/06/ohio-extends-unemployment-benefits-amid-covid-19-pandemic/5384548002/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nbc4i.com/community/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-in-ohio-friday-update-latest-numbers-to-be-released-at-2pm-2/>