



Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies

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Testimony before the House Finance Committee March 10, 2021

Philip E. Cole
Executive Director
Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies

Good morning Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and members of the House Finance Committee. I am Phil Cole, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of H.B. 167.

The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies is an organization that represents Ohio's forty-seven Community Action Agencies serving every county in the State. Community Action Agencies are the primary providers of services to eliminate poverty and to assist those who suffer its ravages as they work to become self-sufficient. We provide a variety of services to our low-income customers including job training and placement, Head Start, affordable housing, housing assistance, health care, transportation, food pantries, home weatherization, and many others. Community Action Agencies serve over 600,000 individual Ohioans in a normal, nonpandemic year, we employ over 6,500 people, and we bring over half billion dollars to Ohio's economy each year. I believe that last year we will find that we worked with over 1 million individual Ohioans.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic effect on our State as you know. Many people have lost their jobs or lost hours worked at their jobs and need help. The Development Services Agency has done incredible work and Director Lydia Mihalik and her staff, especially in the Division of Community Services should be thanked for it. It has been our honor to work with them with our regular programs as well as with the Home Relief programs.

Since November 2, 2020, with the guidance of DSA we have been providing extensive assistance to Ohioans in every county in the State for rental assistance, mortgage assistance and assistance for utilities. Prior to that date, all of our agencies did utility assistance, many did rental assistance, and still others also provided assistance with mortgages. Throughout our history, we have helped people stay in their homes. While we were asked to operate this new program with DSA, to create the local program and distribute the funds in less than two months' time during the holidays, we were happy to do it and we did.



The Home Relief program required work with many other organizations ranging from county and local governments, United Ways, churches, foundations, local banks, school districts, housing authorities, and many, many others. The funds are being distributed, people are remaining in their homes, their utilities are staying on and, to the extent that we can, this DSA program is helping people maintain a more normal life. Allow me to state a few examples.

In Cuyahoga County, since November 2, through our agency and their partners we served approximately 3,000 households with approximately \$2.9 million or about \$2,300 per home served.

Great Lakes Community Action Partnership which serves Wood, Ottawa, Sandusky and Seneca counties, was allocated just over \$1.1 million. All was distributed by December 30, 2020. About 80% was for rental assistance. They kept approximately 500 households in their apartments and homes.

In Franklin County, IMPACT Community Action has spent over \$30 million for home assistance with funds from the State, the City of Columbus and Franklin County. They have formed a coalition of several partners including the courts to keep people housed.

It is the same story on a different scale in every county in Ohio by every Community Action Agency. I assume you do not want me to recite them all, so I will not, but I can provide you more information if you would like.

I would also point out that before the program started, along with DSA we contacted various business organizations to discuss the program and how it would work. These included the Ohio Realtors Association, Ohio Bankers League, and the Ohio Real Estate Investors Association. We also discussed it with various associations of nonprofit groups.

Mr. Chairman, the need is real and it is continuing. This bill is quite timely. The Development Services Agency is the correct department through which the program should be operated as they have a strong record of success. We urge the Committee to pass H.B. 167.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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