



HOUSE BILL 93
PROPONENT TESTIMONY

March 26, 2021

Dear Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of H.B. 93 (Abrams, LaRe) to incorporate real property records into the Safe at Home program for address confidentiality. I am pleased to see the House so quickly taking up this action after the good work done during the 133rd General Assembly on H.B. 429.

The Franklin County Auditor's office routinely hear from residents of Franklin County who are concerned about their information being publicly available. This includes outreach from victims of domestic violence, stalking, human trafficking, rape, or sexual battery that the existing safe at home program is designed to serve. While we connect these individuals to appropriate assistance within our county prosecutor's office, without this legislation our tools to help are limited. It is a tragedy that someone who survived such violence and threat would be hindered in becoming a homeowner because they are still at risk if their address becomes public.

Maintenance of the property records and tax duplicate is a core duty of county auditors. Since taking office almost two years ago my administration has strived to increase access and transparency so the information the office maintains can be best used by the public and by policy makers. I remain committed to these goals, but also recognize when such transparency can be a threat to individual members of our community. This legislation creates important balance of these concerns by maintaining access to property records while shielding individual address information of those who could be at risk.

Under the existing Safe and Home program, a person's true address is replaced on relevant public records by an address generated by the Secretary of State's office where the person can be contacted. This is an effective solution for address confidentiality for many government programs but does not work for property records where the address and physical location of the property is the key index that must be maintained. This need was already recognized for designated public service workers who are permitted to file an affidavit to replace their full name with their initials on the property record. The process in this legislation to replace the name of a participant in the address confidentiality program with a fictitious name will provide the same function-keeping property information accessible while shielding individual identity.



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The legislation also does good work recognizing practical concerns about how information flows between county offices and how an ongoing need for title searches and future sales needs to be accommodated. There will be some adjustment to the transfer process when qualifying individuals are involved, but the bill includes needed exceptions and disclaimers to make this workable. We maintain close relationships with title companies and other stakeholders and will engage to educate the public and real estate professionals on this important option.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to support H.B. 93 as this proposal is an important step to make sure all property owners can feel safe in their own home. I know and appreciate that the legislature will continue to review the important balance between public transparency and individual privacy.

I would be happy to discuss this further with members of the committee as needed. Never hesitate to reach me directly at AuditorStinziano@franklincountyohio.gov or 614-525-5700.

Sincerely,

Michael Stinziano
Franklin County Auditor