



**Senate Ways & Means Committee
Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 57
February 23, 2021**

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 57. My name is Elaine Gimmel, and I am the Executive Director of EDEN, a non-profit housing organization located in Cleveland with over 30 years of experience providing housing solutions to people facing the challenges of housing insecurities and homelessness. EDEN is also a contract agency of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County.

We are a nationally recognized housing provider for our scattered site property portfolio, rental assistance programs, and permanent supportive housing buildings. While EDEN focuses on such housing activities as development, location, housing stability, landlord relations, inspection, maintenance, and management, we partner very closely with on-site community-based agencies to ensure our residents obtain the support services they need to improve their health and well-being and sustain permanent housing. Housing is our foundation, and the linkage of housing and services is the key to the success of the clients we serve.

EDEN currently owns and operates 89 properties with over 1000 units of housing in them. These properties provide housing for persons with extremely low income who have a disability including mental illness, substance use disorders and severe physical health conditions. Losing the property tax exemption which we have had since we were established in 1991, would cost us almost \$1million. This would threaten current operations and services as well as stop any future development of supportive housing for us. We currently have 2 projects in the development phase.

Since 2006, EDEN has collaborated with several community organizations on Cuyahoga County's Housing First Initiative. As the co-developer, co-owner, and property manager of twelve Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) properties, EDEN has witnessed, first hand, how permanent supportive housing helps the most vulnerable among us: individuals who experience long-term homelessness and disabilities.

Our Housing First Initiative uses a nationally recognized, evidence-based permanent supportive housing model to help move individuals experiencing long-term homelessness from the streets into an affordable apartment with medical and supportive services. The key to the front door is really the first step; once individuals are housed; our partners make sure they have the medical and support services necessary to keep them stable. Our permanent supportive housing units much like others across the State, offers a home with medical supports, mental health care, recovery, and employment services to help individuals integrate back into their communities.

We are housing our neighbors who experience complex challenges- those who have been homeless a year or more and who have mental illness, substance use disorders or physical health issues. These cases that are

typically the most difficult to stabilize, but since 2006, Cuyahoga County's Housing First Initiative has reduced the rate of long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County by 80%. There are 783 Housing First apartments across Cleveland. What's more, Housing First is poised to *end long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County* through permanent supportive housing.

Without Senate Bill 57, Housing First will be at significant risk. That means hundreds of our residents, the most vulnerable among us, will be at risk.

Until the Ohio Board of Tax Appeals reversed the long-standing exemptions, our scattered site portfolio as well as our permanent supportive housing buildings had historically been exempted from real property tax. All of these projects, were developed based on a number of rigorous and careful assumptions and calculations, including the existing taxation status of each location. Even under ideal circumstances, these properties typically operate on extremely narrow margins and often supplemented with philanthropic and other funding sources. Without Senate Bill 57 EDEN would face budget gaps for its supportive housing properties of almost \$1million.

Finally, PSH isn't only solving the problem of long-term homelessness, it is saving money. Without PSH, our residents may end up in more expensive places like psychiatric hospitals, emergency rooms, jails, and shelters. By stabilizing these individuals with permanent supportive housing first and then providing supportive services, we estimate that our Housing First Initiative saves the community about \$9.2 million a year. That is because we serve the homeless population who uses a high and disproportionate amount of community emergency resources. Senate Bill 57 would recognize the important savings that permanent supportive housing provides in our state.

Now more than ever, we need to keep people housed. If these residents lose their only affordable and stable housing option during this pandemic, the impact to Ohio increases significantly because they may become homeless and exposed to illnesses like COVID.

Without Senate Bill 57, all of the progress that Cuyahoga County has made toward ending homelessness for veterans, infants and children, families, persons with mental illness, and other disability groups would be in jeopardy.

We urge you to pass this Senate Bill 57. Thank you for your consideration. I am available to answer any questions at egimmel@edencle.org.