

Ohio Senate Ways and Means Committee

Written Proponent Testimony on SB 57

Terry Russell, Executive Director
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Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 57. My name is Terry Russell, and I am the Executive Director at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio. We represent individuals and families with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio believes this legislation is a needed step that will continue to allow more individuals with mental health and substance use disorder maintain community residential housing.

NAMI Ohio's mission is to improve the quality of life, and ensure dignity and respect for person with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio is actively engaged with many program aimed to promote community inclusion for those with serious mental illness. NAMI Ohio offers support, education and advocacy across the state and among our 40 local affiliates.

NAMI Ohio's support SB 57 and the continuation of this tax exemption so that housing organizations are able to continue leveraging federal, state, and local funds to most effectively meet consumer and community needs. This bill would codify the long-standing and noncontroversial property tax exemption for supportive housing options for individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a cost-effective housing model that combines safe, affordable housing with on-site supportive services aimed at helping residents achieve housing stability while addressing health and wellness issues and increasing their personal and economic independence. PSH offers permanent housing with supportive services targeting the most fragile members of the community, including formerly homeless and disabled individuals, veterans, seniors, and/or persons living in nursing homes or other institutional settings. Many PSH programs target low-income adults with disabling conditions such as physical/medical/developmental disabilities, mental illness, and/or co-occurring disorders.

If individuals with a mental illness or a substance use disorder lose their only affordable and stable housing option during this pandemic, they will likely end up in more expensive places like homeless shelters, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, or involved in the criminal justice system. This would be both the more expensive option and more detrimental for the health of the individuals we are collectively working to serve.

It is good policy to maintain a critical component of Ohio's homeless response system. For NAMI Ohio, housing is one of the most critical social determinant of health, and an upstream solution to some of Ohio's most pressing mental health policy concerns. Supporting PSH is an opportunity for Ohio to invest in evidence-based solutions now to avoid greater crisis later, and we ask for your support in preserving the necessary tax exemption.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact me at Terry@namiohio.org or 614-224-2700.