

Proponent Testimony for Ohio House Bill 438
Neaira Williams, Realtor
Toledo, Ohio
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Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of House Bill 438. My name is Neaira Williams, and I am a young, dedicated realtor based in Toledo. I'm also the proud wife of State Representative Josh Williams. Together, we have experienced the many challenges that come with navigating the homebuying process, and I'm here today to share my perspective both as a professional in real estate and as someone who has personally faced potential bias in this industry.

Like many aspiring homeowners, I have experienced the anxiety of putting in offers and waiting for a response. But unlike some, my anxiety has been compounded by an additional factor: my name, Neaira. My name, which some might label as "ethnic" at first glance, has often raised unspoken questions about who I am before I've even had a chance to meet sellers or negotiate terms.

There were times when I wondered if my offers were being passed over simply because they came with my name attached. As a Black woman attempting to purchase a home in neighborhoods, where the majority of the residents don't look like me, I couldn't help but feel the weight of potential racial bias. This isn't just speculation—discriminatory practices have long plagued our housing market, making it harder for people like me to access opportunities that should be open to everyone.

It's these personal experiences that inspired me to become a realtor. I wanted to help others achieve the American dream of homeownership without the barriers of bias or discrimination. Every day, I work with clients who dream of buying their first home, moving into a better school district, or simply finding a place they can call their own. It's my mission to ensure that these dreams are realized based on merit and opportunity, not prejudice or preconceived notions.

House Bill 438 represents a vital step toward eliminating one of the avenues through which discrimination can occur in real estate. By preventing the disclosure of personal information—such as names, ages, and races—before a contract is agreed upon, this bill ensures that all buyers are judged by the strength of their offers, not by who they are.

As my husband, Representative Josh Williams, and I know firsthand, the stress of buying a home is already significant. Personal identifiers like my name should never be among the factors that determine whether or not a family can secure a home. No one should have to wonder if their background or identity played a role in losing out on a property.

Discrimination has no place in the homebuying process. This bill is about fairness and ensuring that every person has an equal chance to achieve one of life's most significant milestones: owning a home. If this legislation can prevent even one family from experiencing the pain of discrimination, it will have made a meaningful difference.

I stand here today not only as a realtor but as someone who believes in justice, equality, and the promise of the American dream. I cannot remain silent when I see a proposal, championed by my husband, that has the potential to bring us closer to those ideals. I urge this committee to support House Bill 438 and help ensure that every Ohioan, regardless of their name or background, has a fair shot at homeownership.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,
Neaira Williams
Realtor, Toledo, Ohio