



**Board of County  
Commissioners**

**Pete Gerken**  
*President*

**Lisa A. Sobecki**  
**Anita Lopez**

Testimony before the Ohio Senate Select Committee on Housing

Testimony  
January 31, 2024

Lucas County Board of Commissioners

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Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Craig, and all of the esteemed members of the Senate Select Committee on Housing, the Lucas County Commissioners respectfully submit this written testimony today regarding the housing challenges faced not only by Lucas County residents, but by Ohioans throughout the state, regardless of race, income, or the community in which they live. The shortage of accessible and affordable housing options in our communities is emblematic of broader economic issues that, without our collective attention, will increasingly undermine the American dream of broad-based homeownership.

Like many communities throughout the state, the demand for affordable housing in Lucas County has reached a critical moment. Our community is grappling with the consequences of rapidly rising housing costs, limited affordable housing stock, and increased incidence of homelessness. Complicating the issue is the fact that the demand for housing and the cost of building middle-class, market-rate housing for first time homebuyers is beginning to exceed an attainable sale price. As representatives of the most populous county in northwest Ohio (currently estimated at 431,279), we have observed the profound impact these concerns have on the lives of our constituents.

In Lucas County, we have taken great strides to address the issue. Through partnerships with our local housing authority, the area homelessness continuum of care, housing advocates, and private developers, we have invested a substantial portion of our American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Local Fiscal Recovery Funds allocation into diverse housing projects dedicated to housing low-income seniors and permanent supportive housing for youth aging out of foster care. We have not only supported permanent supportive housing for reentry populations and chronically homeless individuals, but have also buoyed workforce housing developments for constituents working on their own to make ends meet.

Unfortunately, despite support from both Lucas County and the City of Toledo for housing, the investments made possible by ARPA has only begun to address the enduring shortfall in new housing construction that never fully recovered after the 2008 recession. A 2019 gap analysis in which the county participated indicated that the Lucas County will need an estimated 30,000 new units by 2029 to keep pace with demand. As is required by ARPA, Lucas County will have 100% of our Local Fiscal Recovery Fund obligated by the end of 2024. There is not a local public mechanism capable of supporting the tremendous housing demand our community faces once these federal dollars are expended.

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As stated above, the tremendous demand for housing, coupled with construction not keeping pace with that demand has led to a rapid increase in the cost of housing that benefits current owners but erects substantial barriers for working Ohioans interested in renting or purchasing a safe, quality home for their families. As such, continued public investment in the development of all kinds of new housing development will be critical if we are to continue to add housing units necessary to grow our communities and fuel our economies. Additionally, a notable percentage of Ohio's housing stock was built before 1970 and may fall into disrepair or will require lead remediation.

For these reasons, we contend that local resources alone will not be able to meet increasing demand and maintenance of existing housing stock, and state-level investment in rental housing and owner-occupied housing will be crucial if we are to build sufficient housing to deliver on the promise that Ohio is the place to build a life and raise a family. We therefore propose the following:

The State of Ohio should enhance housing construction funding through a housing line-item in the biennial state budget whereby local governments, developers, and housing authorities may apply for financing to close the funding gap for critical housing projects. In addition, we recommend that the state dedicate a portion of revenues generated from anticipated taxes generated on marijuana sales be dedicated to housing.

As the increasing prevalence of remote work has left many once-bustling office buildings vacant, we also recommend that the state make additional resources available to convert office buildings into housing.

Finally, we offer that existing state programs designed to sustain older housing stock in legacy communities need vastly more resources. Building new housing is critical, but preserving older homes will help to ensure that senior Ohioans can age in place while our communities increase the total number of housing units and uphold their unique identities.

If Lucas County is to continue to experience the economic renaissance we have enjoyed over the past two decades, we need a substantial investment in housing. To attract the industry and workforce of the future, our community must be able to provide the housing necessary. For Ohio to achieve sustained economic growth in the decades to come, a cohesive, deliberate housing policy must be enacted. To achieve these objectives, we will need the state to make a robust investment. Please contact our office if you would like to discuss these matters further.

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