



**Jeffrey Rickerman, Past-President
Ohio Real Estate Investors Association
Proponent Testimony – HB 93
Senate Local Government Committee
November 13, 2024**

Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of House Bill 93. My name is Jeffrey Rickerman, and I am the Past-President of Ohio Real Estate Investors Association (OREIA). OREIA represents 15 local associations with over 4,000 members across Ohio. I am so very proud of our members for all the work they put into their communities.

Our members do not sit back and wait for something to happen they make good things happen in Ohio every day. Our members are active citizens of communities all throughout the great state of Ohio, taking big risks, rolling up their sleeves, employing local workers and contractors, and patronizing local businesses. Our members take either abandoned derelict properties or run down properties and turn them into safe, affordable, and wonderful homes for Ohioans every day. Ohio is a better place for the efforts of OREIA members all throughout the State.

I have been doing this very same thing in my community of Alliance Ohio for the last ten years and it has been my pleasure to serve many wonderful families. I am a simple man; I was raised on a farm, and I was raised a Quaker. We were taught that if you break something you fix it, if you use something you pay for it. One of the Quaker creeds is to live simply, that others may simply live. To me this means conserving resources, including water and always doing the right thing. My wife and I live in the same community that we serve; our water bill never goes over the minimum (\$48) a month. We have had residents in our properties who have water bills of \$600 to \$700 a month! Where is all this water going other than down the drain, they cannot tell us! One of my goals of running a fair business is to have a good relationship with our residents. I always make sure there is nothing leaking in the house. Some residents carelessly use water since they have no responsibility to pay for the usage.

Just what kind of a message are we teaching here? That you can squander and waste all the community resources that you want, and you don't have to pay for them? Not to worry, just run all the water you want down the drain on someone else's tab. Whose tab is that on it's on the housing provider's tab! Eventually it's going to be on the tab of that young family just starting out or that family just moving to Ohio, or that elderly couple just trying to get by. The way the system is set up now, when the resident (the one using or wasting all this water) does not pay their bill, it goes to the owner of the house. How is this fair? How does this make any sense? Is this because the municipality does not want to do the work to charge the person who used the resource?

OREIA is extremely grateful to Representative Johnson and Representative McClain for introducing HB 93 to fix this problem that has gone on for decades in Ohio. A problem that has an easy solution

which is called accountability and responsibility. No society will ever thrive without responsible citizens!

Housing providers are mostly small businesses and just like any other business, when a business is running at a loss there are several options, increase charges for services/products or cut back on costs, which generally means an inferior product or service. We all witnessed what has happened over the last three plus years with operating costs for businesses going through the roof. When a resident uses a resource (whether an owner of the property or a lessee of the property) they need to pay the bill for that usage. If the bill goes past due it should be collected, or the service should be disconnected. This is how things work in the great nation of United States. OREIA believes that HB 93 provides a practical solution to this situation. Individuals who have not used or contracted for service should not be liable for unpaid charges that were accrued by someone else.

Again, I am a simple man, the solution to this decades old problem looks very simple to me. Have the person who used a resource pay for that resource this keeps everyone honest and accountable for their actions. Isn't this what our nation is founded on? Fairness, equality, and financial responsibility for each and every one of us? When property owners are held liable for their tenant's unpaid bills, we all know what happens. The cost is passed on to future residents, folks who had nothing to do with resource misuse or the failure to pay for what was used.

As more and more Ohioans make the conscious choice to rent rather than own their home, HB 93 provides a fair resolution to all parties involved. This solution will allow housing providers to continue providing affordable, safe, comfortable, and available housing to millions of Ohioans, OREIA believes the passage of HB 93 will help provide necessary protections to ensure that these options continue.

Currently residents can contract for water, use the water, not pay the bill, walk away and contract again at their new residence for water. The water company does not shut off their service when the bill is unpaid, it just charges the homeowner, or puts a lien against the house. Some of our members have been required to pay over \$9000.00 for water they did not use a drop of.

With other utilities, such as gas, electricity and internet, the resident uses the service and pays the bill. If the bill becomes past due, the service is cut off. When the bill remains unpaid the user ends up with a judgment against them. Why is it different for water usage?

OREIA is the recognized leader in fair, safe and affordable housing. Passing HB 93 will ensure that our members are able to continue our mission while also creating a more equitable environment for all Ohioans into the future. We urge you to pass this critical consumer protection legislation.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of HB 93. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.