

Testimony from Lila J. Wohlwend, Broker, OPHP, NaPHP, AMS, Clear Sky Realty, Inc.  
Re: support of HB 93

Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Local Government Committee, my name is Lila Wohlwend, and I am a property manager who represents 46 owners and just under 500 homes in the Stark County and surrounding area. I have been in the property management industry for over 20 years and hope my experience will be a benefit for you today. I would like to thank you in advance for your time to hear my support of HB 93.

Over the years, I have watched multiple municipal utility departments put liens on properties against non-owner-occupied residences for charges that property owners did not use nor have the control to limit.

I have provided 2 examples from 2 different municipal water utilities. The first one is from the Municipality of Sebring. While they did threaten to shut off water service, the water department never turned it off, even though the tenant who lived in this property didn't pay her water bills. As you can see in Exhibit A, the water company allowed over \$1500 in charges to date. This is not the final bill from this tenant. That bill is still pending.

The second example is from the City of Alliance Water Utility. This municipal utility also threatened to terminate service, but even with us asking them to shut it off, they did not do so. As you can see in Exhibit B, there are over \$1500 in charges for this property as well that the owners could not stop or limit. Then, as soon as the tenants were out, the water company turned off the service at a time when the owners needed it on to get the property back into rent ready shape.

Why are these government utility departments not turning off water per their own policies? There is no incentive for them to do so. Water Departments know that no matter what amounts accrue, the owner will have to pay the bill. Requests from owners to stop service when residents aren't paying go ignored, so there is no way to limit the costs the housing providers have to pay.

Even worse, the tenants have figured out that the water bill charges will not follow them. This practice is encouraging tenants to not pay their bill, since there are no negative consequences for them. What would you think if your neighbor ran up his credit card bill and you were required to pay for it? Wouldn't you want to limit those charges? The water bill is similar here, as the owners are not using that service. The tenants are.

HB 93 can help limit the damage caused to housing providers from their tenant's usage of municipal utilities. It will encourage the municipalities to follow their own policies, including turning off service when needed. Once that happens, it will also encourage tenants to be more responsible with the bills for the utility they are using, as they will be without service if they do not keep up with those bills. This could also limit the municipality's unpaid amounts, which should make everyone's life better.

Chairwoman O'Brien and members of the committee, Thank you for your time in allowing me to testify in support of HB 93. If you have any questions for me, I would be happy to answer them at this time.