

Senate Committee on Ways & Means  
Senate Bill 244 – Proponent Testimony

Matthew Strauss  
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Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 244. My name is Matt Strauss, with the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency. This issue is critical to our clients who are struggling to make ends meet, especially with housing expenses. Senate Bill 244 would help low-income homeowners across Ohio by giving their local governments the authority to limit increases in assessed value by creating Residential Stability Zones.

Like other people who care about housing in Ohio, I understand that it's a complicated issue. From housing supply to property taxes, we need many different solutions to deal with the many ways housing has become unaffordable to too many Ohioans.

I am especially concerned about property taxes and how the process of reassessing property values can displace people – especially longtime homeowners. I'm concerned about the property tax increase crisis because it directly affects so many of our clients. Seniors on fixed incomes, especially families of color, are disproportionately harmed by this sudden increase. Before the most recent re-valuation, the Black homeownership gap was just beginning to decrease after decades of legal discrimination has kept them out of home ownership. This loss prevents the creation of generational wealth that could lift our client families out of poverty and into self-sufficiency.

**That's why I am submitting testimony in support of one issue in particular: Residential Stability Zones, as presented in Senate Bill 244.** Residential Stability Zones would offer some targeted relief from skyrocketing property taxes to low-income homeowners. Modeling Ohio's existing law on residential tax abatement, Senate Bill 244 would authorize local municipalities to implement a permissive program tailored to their residents, but always within guardrails to focus these programs on longterm homeowners who are low-income.

Residential Stability Zones could help many different types of Ohioans. They could help seniors stay in their homes and benefit from new development and investment that happens around them, without having to worry about taxing them out of their homes. It could help families with kids stay in a neighborhood where they've been living for years, keeping those kids in the same schools they're used to and in the same community of support. And Residential Stability Zones would ease pressure on developers who want to bring investment into our communities, but often face the fears and worries from longtime residents scared that new development will displace them by increasing property taxes and making their homes suddenly unaffordable.

Personally, I also believe that Senate Bill 244 and Residential Stability Zones are a good idea because it allows County and municipal officials to tailor a program that can thoughtfully address the very specific concerns in their jurisdiction. This is not a one size fits all problem, so a more surgical approach will be more effective and will save money.

I understand that the General Assembly is considering many other proposals and bills to deal with housing and property taxes. Senate Bill 244 is just one tool, and I understand that it is not a silver bullet. But, if passed into law, it would make a meaningful difference for thousands of Ohioans. And, in combination with existing programs and other bills under consideration, it can be another tool to help preserve homeownership for Ohioans.

Thank you for your consideration, and we would be happy to answer any question you have.