



**Senate Ways & Means Committee
Interested Party Testimony, Senate Bill 244 (Reynolds, Craig)
Jason Warner, Director of Strategic Engagement, Greater Ohio Policy Center
Tuesday, June 25, 2024**

Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 244, which grants permissive authority to townships, counties, and municipalities to establish Residential Stability Zones. We are excited by the potential SB244 has in providing relief to long-term homeowners from substantial increases in their property tax bills.

My name is Jason Warner. I am the Director of Strategic Engagement at the Greater Ohio Policy Center. Greater Ohio is Ohio's leading advocate for urban revitalization and sustainable growth, working to improve the communities of Ohio through smart growth strategies and research.

Several years ago, Greater Ohio provided early research, which has evolved into the legislation that is before you. We have also stewarded two communities of practice that have informed the development of this bill: the Ohio Affordable Housing Learning Exchange, and the Ohio Revitalization Steering Committee. This legislation has been vetted by dozens of housing and community development experts from around the state.

SB244 grants permissive authority to cities and local governments to create **Residential Stability Zones**, where eligible homeowners could apply to receive relief from escalating property taxes.

Homeowners who meet the specified criteria for eligibility would then receive a reduced increase in assessed value for an eligible primary residence. The reduction, if approved, would be in effect for 6 years, after which the homeowner must re-apply if they are still eligible. For homeowners who are over the age of 60, the relief granted would be permanent, so they can prepare for retirement and avoid the hassles of re-applying in old age.

Greater Ohio Policy Center recognizes the importance of providing for the long-term stability of neighborhoods as a key to helping communities remain vibrant. Residents on fixed-incomes who are still capable of maintaining a home in a neighborhood, especially those neighborhoods that lie closer to a city center, help to maintain an area's character and vibrancy.

Increasingly, too many of these neighborhoods have fallen prey to outside investors. These investors see residents that cannot keep-up with ever-increases property tax obligations and make these homeowners offers they can't refuse. They offer the owner cash on the table to buy the home, and then convert the property from an owner-occupied to a renter-occupied structure. Then, they gradually allow the home to slip in quality.

Rather than being a residence that is maintained by an owner who is building equity that they can use to pay for their children's college tuition or cover other major expenses, , the home is often-times maintained just to minimum standards to keep local code inspectors at bay.

Greater Ohio recognizes that there is an argument to be made that efforts to keep long-term residence in their homes keeps quality starter homes from reaching the marketplace. The same can be said for any number of recent initiatives the state has embarked on to support Ohioans to age in place.

We certainly want to see more starter homes available as homeownership helps to build strong, stable, and vibrant neighborhoods. Increasing the supply of starter homes can be accomplished through other means besides pricing out long-time homeowners.

Greater Ohio recognizes SB244 as one in a number of tools that will help address the affordable housing crisis the state is experiencing. Many of the other bills resulting from the work of the Senate Select Committee on Housing are working to increase Ohio's housing supply. More housing will help to bring down prices that have sky-rocketed as a result of a shortage of available homes. Ultimately, this will combat efforts to convert homes to rental units.

Chair Blessing and members of the Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 244. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the legislation.