To Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and Members of the Community Revitalization Committee:

My name is Susan Koller, and I live in Cincinnati. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in support of House Bill 585, which would give the Director of the Department of Developmental Disabilities expanded authority over the community capital assistance funds and would lead to more flexibility on how community capital assistance funds can be used to provide housing for those with developmental disabilities like myself. In the following paragraphs, I will lay out just one of many examples of how I think this flexibility would benefit people with developmental disabilities.

I use an electric wheelchair, have cerebral palsy, and need close to 24/7 care from Direct Service professionals (DSPs) to help me complete my activities of daily living. The help I need includes helping me with activities as simple as helping me get a drink of water to more complicated activities like giving me a shower and putting me to bed. Despite the severity of my disability, I am proud that I live independently in my own apartment.

My apartment is wonderfully accessible. Despite the fact of its accessibility, there are some drawbacks to the setup of my apartment complex. Two of the biggest drawbacks of my apartment complex set up are that there are only four apartments in a complex and that all the apartments are occupied by people with disabilities. Having to live in the apartment building that is just for people with disabilities makes me feel somewhat segregated from my wider community. Another issue is the other three residents in my complex do not get out much. Consequently, this means that the only people I see are my DSPs and my family and friends when they can stop by to see me. This set up leaves me feeling isolated from the community at large.

My situation that I described above is why I wish there could be more flexibility in how community capital assistance funds could be used to provide a broader selection of housing choices for people with developmental disabilities. In my dream scenario, the funds could be used to build apartment buildings with apartments for people with disabilities and those without. Having people with disabilities living side-by-side with people without disabilities gives everyone a chance to interact more and feel like part of the community. As mentioned above, living in this kind of apartment complex would stop people with disabilities from being segregated in housing that is just for people with disabilities. To me, living in a bigger apartment building would give me the opportunity to meet more people and learn more about what is going on in the wider community.

Along with giving people with disabilities the chance to meet more people, building apartment complexes with apartments for people with disabilities and people without disabilities may help solve one of the big issues faced by people with disabilities. This issue is finding highly trained, caring and reliable DSPs to provide care for them. As I mentioned above, I rely on DSPs to provide almost 24/7 assistance with my activities of daily living. I cannot live without these invaluable people. Sometimes the DSPs can live far away from the people they care for in this makes it even harder to get care. If an apartment complex had apartments for people with disabilities and those without, potentially the DSPs could live in the apartment complex near the people for whom they provide care. This would help solve the issue of DSPs living far away.

Another advantage of having the DSPs live in the same complex as the people they care for is maybe people with disabilities who live in the same complex could share DSPs. There is a great shortage of DSPs and people sharing DSPs would help alleviate this shortage. A final benefit of having the DSPs living in the same complex as the people they care for is that if a person did not need care for a certain amount of time the DSP could wait in their own apartment instead of waiting in the person with a disability's apartment. This would allow both the DSP and the person with a disability to have their own space. Right now, I live in a one-bedroom apartment and my DSPs and I are often on top of each other.

Allowing community capital assistance funds to be used to build apartment complexes for both people with disabilities and those without disabilities is just one example of the flexibility County Boards of Developmental Disabilities and other organizations that provide housing using these funds would have if this bill is passed. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to share my insights and opinions on this bill. If you have any questions or would like clarification on anything I have shared, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Koller