Proponent Testimony on House Bill 585
Nick Comstock
Columbus, Ohio
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Chairman Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the Community Revitalization Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my experience and provide testimony today regarding House Bill 585.

My name is Nick Comstock and I live in Columbus, Ohio. I am also the host of the podcast Nick Speaks, which focuses on issues affecting the disabled community.

For most of my life, many people around me—including members of my own family—did not believe I would accomplish many of the things I am doing today, especially living independently. Growing up, I did not always have a lot of support or encouragement when it came to what my future could look like.

This July will mark eleven years since my parents and I moved to Ohio. When we first arrived, we moved into my grandparents' home in Richland County. Living with my grandparents was actually great. I just didn't imagine that I would also be bringing my parents along with me.

But like many people with disabilities, independence did not come easily or quickly.

That is why January 3, 2018 was such a significant day in my life.

That was the day I moved out of my family home and into a house with roommates in Richland County. Even though I was moving into a shared living situation, it still felt like my liberation day—my Fourth of July, my Independence Day.

When I entered Ohio's developmental disabilities system in 2016, I was told that if I wanted to live in the community, the typical path would be to live in a home with roommates first. I was told that shared living would be a stepping stone and that if it did not work out, then living on my own could potentially be considered later.

In some ways, it did serve as a stepping stone. Living with roommates helped me transition into living and experience life outside my family home.

I also had some genuinely good moments with the roommates I lived with.

However, the reality was that we were living in two very different worlds. Cognitively speaking, we were simply not on the same level, and that created challenges in day-to-day living. Shared living works well for some people, but it is not always the right fit for everyone.

In my case, I believe a more individualized approach would have made more sense from the beginning. Instead, it sometimes felt like the system was focused on fitting people into a standard model rather than looking at each person's situation on a case-by-case basis.

Because of that, I ended up living with roommates for about two and a half years.

In the spring of 2021, around April or May, I was finally able to move into my own apartment.

That change made a significant difference in my life. Living in my own apartment allows me to have control over my daily schedule and my personal environment. It allows me to work, advocate, host my podcast, and live as independently as possible while still receiving the supports I need.

My experience illustrates why housing options matter so much for people with disabilities. Some individuals thrive in shared living arrangements. Others function much better living independently with the right supports.

The key is having options. But those options only exist if there are enough housing opportunities available in the community in the first place.

Policies that expand housing opportunities and community-based living options allow people with disabilities to live in environments that actually work for them rather than forcing everyone into the same model.

House Bill 585 represents an opportunity to expand the number and types of housing opportunities available in the community, making sure people with disabilities can find more independent living arrangements that truly fit their needs rather than being limited to a single model.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience today. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Nick Comstock