Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullens, Ranking Member Brewer and the entire committee, thank you for the honor to testify in support of House Bill 585. I'm Emily Kendall, the co-founder of EmpowerMe Living and the EmpowerMe Center for Housing Innovation, organizations focused on solutions for the supportive housing crisis. I am also a mom and two of my children, Luke and Grace, have developmental disabilities.

My grandfather, Jack Bechtold, served three terms in this House after returning from World War II as a decorated prisoner of war. I'm here to honor his legacy and to ask you to advance HB 585 so Ohioans with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities can live with dignity in housing that meets their needs and preferences.

Here is the reality. Right now, in Ohio, more than 77,000 adults with I/DD live at home with caregivers over the age of 60. Since inception, the Community Capital Assistance program as it currently exists, produced 77 housing units. 77 versus 77,000. This is what happens when results are sacrificed on the altar of rules, regulations, and procedures.

We recently surveyed of adults with I/DD and their families across Greater Cincinnati. They told us, very clearly, that people want and need real choices: 57% prefer apartments, 49% townhomes, and 35% accessory dwelling units. Fifty-four percent want mixed-use neuroinclusive communities, and 45% want to live alone without housemates. Across the board they asked for universal design, security, easy-to-clean features, and supportive amenities like benefits counseling, community navigation, meal service, and transportation. HB 585 modernizes CCA to better align with the needs and preferences expressed by adults and families in our research.

Our research also shows that the top future concerns of adults with I/DD was forced placement in a group home or adult foster care, followed closely by homelessness.

Without modernization and deregulation of the CCA program as it currently exists, those future concerns are not far from reality. It's estimated that 30-40% of our current homeless population in this country has some type of developmental disability and loss of caregiver is the leading contributor.

The cost of inaction is staggering. In our four-county Greater Cincinnati region alone, roughly 12,000 of those 77,000 live with aging caregivers. If even 30%—about 3,000 people—lose housing as caregivers age out, and if the public-system cost averages a conservative $35,000 per person per year, over ten years we are talking about spending that

will result in a stack of dollar bills 19 miles high. That's nearly three times higher than a commercial airline flies – think about that the next time you are in an airplane.

I understand this is a "lame duck" session and the instinct is to wait. My grandfather, who served in this chamber lived out his values – that service to others, especially those who need it most, is paramount. He died unexpectedly of a heart attack at 54. He would tell you, as would those aging parents, that we don't have time to wait. He would ask you to take action. But he is not here today to carry on his legacy, I am.

If you take one thing away from my testimony, remember this –
there will never be a moment when the need for housing is smaller than it is right now.

Tomorrow more caregivers will age out. More sons and daughters will lose their only support system. Tomorrow the stack of consequences will tower even higher than that stack of dollar bills you were imagining.

Now is the time we act for every Ohioan living with a countdown they cannot stop. For every parent like me whose greatest fear is not their own death, but what happens to their loved one after it.

This is the moment where we come together as Ohioans and decide to leave families with a future – not an aftermath.

Advancing House Bill 585 is the catalyst to sweeping change. Let your legacy be one that elevates Ohio to lead the country in supportive housing.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.