



Columbus-Franklin County Finance Authority

Patty Huddle, President
300 Spruce Street ~ Suite 220
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Office 614.427.0394
Mobile 614.560.0211
PHuddle@columbusfinance.org
www.columbusfinance.org

Ohio House Development Committee
Opponent Testimony, Substitute House Bill 147 (Lorenz)
Columbus-Franklin County Finance Authority
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Good Morning Chair Hoops, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Brownlee, and members of the House Development Committee:

My name is Patty Huddle. I am the President of the Columbus-Franklin County Finance Authority. I am here today to express my opposition to Substitute House Bill 147 because the proposed legislation functionally removes local community input from the incentive approval process and creates a new statewide program of automatic sales tax exemptions, ignoring our decades of experience in administering local development incentive programs.

The Finance Authority was formed in 2006 by the City of Columbus and Franklin County. Franklin County and the City of Columbus each appoint four members to our board and then appoint one board member jointly. The Board of Directors governs our organization. I report to our board of directors, creating direct accountability to the city and the county for the projects we approve.

The system as it exists today is working. Last year alone, the Columbus-Franklin County Finance Authority incentivized projects resulting in commitments to construct over (i) 7,200 multifamily housing units, with almost fifty percent at or below 80% AMI and twenty-five percent being below 60% AMI, (ii) 125,000 square feet of office space, and (iii) 2 million square feet of flex industrial space. This level of investment in our region clearly shows the existing statutory framework is working to support development, not stifle it.

The impetus for Substitute House Bill 147 is increased uniformity in the award of sales tax exemptions. However, this tool was never intended to be used in a uniform manner. Rather, it is to be used to support and encourage investment in locations and uses desired by the community. When I was with One Columbus one of my roles was to help local communities prepare for the future. The most important aspect of that is planning and understanding the development you desire and can support and deploying resources accordingly. The amount and type of development occurring in Franklin County may not be what other communities in Ohio need. The use of

incentives may vary to accomplish each community's unique development needs, but those decisions need to remain at the local community level and not be dictated by the state.

When evaluating a sales tax exemption request, the Finance Authority reviews the project's merits and confirms it aligns with our region's economic and community development goals. Reviews are project-dependent and cannot always be responsibly completed within a specified timeframe. It is not uncommon to wait weeks to compile the information we review due to the flow of information from the developer. 30 days can come and go very quickly. The Finance Authority maintains a robust program to provide sales tax exemptions in a manner that incentivizes the development but with discretion and as efficiently as possible and in the public's best interest. By allowing each developer to unilaterally propose different structures and then be entitled to appeal to the Ohio Tax Credit Authority, the proposed legislation not only removes important local input on incentives, but also eliminates our ability to administer a consistent program that protects us from liability and protects the public interest, disregarding our decades of experience in overseeing our sales tax exemption program.

Finally, the proposed legislation is not necessary. My organization is governed by a board of directors that meets publicly once a month. Staff also routinely meet with City of Columbus and Franklin County staff to discuss the projects we are working on. There already exist multiple opportunities for a developer to provide input into our decision-making process and adding a state board completely disconnected from the unique community circumstances is not needed.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I am happy to answer any questions.