

Good Morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Finance Committee. My name is Ryan Cassell and I am the Chief Real Estate Development Officer of Community Housing Network.

Since 1987, CHN has been developing and managing apartments and family homes for people experiencing homelessness with mental illness, substance use disorders, and trauma-related issues.

People who have experienced homelessness need to feel safe. People contending with mental illness, substance use disorder, or trauma-related issues often need supportive services and resources to move forward.

CHN starts with housing because it fulfills a basic human need. Once this need is met our residents can address other human needs, especially those that are complex and chronic.

With each resident we serve, CHN is also serving Franklin County by decreasing homelessness, combatting the rise of mental health issues, and creating a community in which everyone—including people with disabilities—has equitable opportunities to enjoy dignified, productive, and purposeful lives.

We do this work because home matters—to everyone. And to the most vulnerable members of our community, home is where healing starts. It is the foundation of stability and well-being—and all the opportunities that lie beyond.

CHN's Use of OHTF

CHN has utilized the OHTF to help finance 15 properties in the past 20 years. The OHTF funding ranged from \$250,000 to \$750,000 per property and totaled approximately \$7.87 million. These 15 properties contain 825 apartments all of which serve households who have disabilities, the majority of who have mental health challenges and have experienced homelessness. For every dollar that the OHTF contributed to these 15 properties, CHN raise approximately \$19 from other sources. Showing that our properties are valued by a variety of funders, including the state of Ohio.

In addition, CHN receives OHTF funding from the Ohio Department of Development's Supportive Housing Program. The Supportive Housing Program funding CHN receives is approximately \$230,000 every two years that CHN receives from ODOD to help CHN staff supportive services at 3 permanent supportive housing properties with over 150 units. This funding is a keystone to our service funding because it has been steady and reliable for years and this stability is required for us to access other funding.

The Ohio Housing Trust Fund is a critical resource to CHN.

Request

CHN requests that the State continues to dedicate the County Recorder Fees to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund so that it will continue to be a valuable resource to housing programs throughout the state. It should be noted that the structure of the OHTF requires 50% of the funding to go to rural areas of the state and helps these areas with their housing needs.

Columbus and Franklin County have seen an increase in the number of people who are homeless. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of people who were homeless on a day in January in 2024 was 2,380 people, a 1.8% increase over 2023. Worst still, there was a 3% increase in unsheltered homelessness reported in 2024 compared to 2023. Being unsheltered means a substantial increase in poor outcomes and experiences for these people. One study found that unsheltered women were 3 times more likely to be in poor health 12 times more likely to be experiencing poor mental health compared to those individuals who were in homeless shelters.

Much of the Federal funding that has been supporting the homeless system during COVID pandemic will expire. In Franklin County, this represents approximately \$10 M leaving our system, a system that already operates with significant shortfalls, leaving our system with fewer resources after June 30.

This is not the time to remove State resources from Housing.

Instead, we ask you to dedicate Recording Fees anew to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and to ensure that the OHTF receives the minimum funding of \$65 Million.