OHIO APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

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Laura Swanson, Executive Director

Ohio Apartment Association

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 92

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Chair King and Members of the House Local Government Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on behalf of the members of the Ohio Apartment Association (OAA) in support of House Bill 92.

My name is Laura Swanson and I serve as Executive Director of OAA, a federation of nine local apartment associations. OAA members own and/or manage approximately 500,000 rental units located in urban, suburban and rural communities across the state of Ohio.

Our members typically are the owners and/or operators of apartment communities, as opposed to one-off single-family rentals or small-scale multi-unit properties. In our communities, the manner in which utilities are provided can vary greatly – sometimes we as landlords are the contracting party for utility services, but it is equally likely that our tenants are contracting directly for their own utility services.

As other proponents have testified, an issue arises when our tenant has contracted for a utility service directly from a municipality but fails to pay for those services. Far too often, instead of pursuing collection of the unpaid debt or cutting service to the account, the municipality will certify a property tax lien against the property. Thus, unfairly shifting the debt from the party that contracted for the service and violated the contract to the property owner.

This practice is particularly troublesome for our members. Our properties, which can have dozens and dozens of individual units, are being penalized for the failure of one tenant to pay their utility bills. And all too often, our members do not discover this problem until after the tenant has moved and we no longer have any recourse or even ability to find the former tenant.

We support Substitute House Bill 93's effort to address this issue in a way that is more fair to property owners and still provides municipal utility providers with a process to address unpaid bills.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.