



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

WRITTEN INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY ON AMENDED SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 96

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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for Am. Sub. House Bill 96 on behalf of the Ohio Mayors Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of mayors in Ohio's largest cities and suburbs.

The Ohio Mayors Alliance represents both Republican and Democratic mayors in Ohio's 30 largest cities. We also represent the city of Athens, which is a member of our coalition on behalf of a regional coalition in Southeast Ohio known as the Mayors Partnership for Progress. Our priorities include protecting the fiscal health of Ohio's cities, preserving home rule and local control, and promoting the importance of bipartisanship and state and local collaboration.

We also want to underscore the important role that Ohio's cities and local communities play in driving regional growth and supporting Ohio's statewide economic success. It is with this in mind that we offer the following recommendations for your consideration on Am. Sub. HB 96.

PURSUE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SPORTS STADIUM FUNDING, REQUIRE LOCAL CONSENSUS

The current \$600 million bond proposal to relocate Cleveland Browns Stadium outside the city of Cleveland raises two concerns. First, the state of **Ohio needs a comprehensive, statewide approach to sports stadium funding**. A statewide approach would not only help to address the needs of facilities in other parts of the state, but it would also set standards and expectations to manage future requests for funding. Second, as it relates to economic and cultural institutions such as professional sports teams and their stadiums, **local consensus must be established before the state intervenes**. This is especially important when relocating an important economic institution from one local community and into another. **By requiring local consensus or an MOU from the affected political subdivisions, this will ensure that the state is not picking winners and losers or causing economic harm in any one Ohio community over another.**

ESTABLISHING A NEW, DEDICATED PUBLIC SAFETY FUND

Public safety is the largest and most important budgetary expense for our members and most municipal governments across Ohio. On average, nearly two-thirds of a typical municipal general revenue fund budget goes to public safety costs. Additionally, police and fire personnel are often the largest share of municipal employees and the cost to attract, retain, and support our public safety professionals has never been higher or more challenging.

Over the last several years, our cities have invested heavily in public safety, hiring more officers and increasing wages for local first responders. Cities have also leveraged state and federal grants to enhance investments in local public safety. As a result, we have seen historic reductions in homicides and other violent crimes in our larger cities. Continuing to improve public safety is critically important and maintaining these investments is essential to our residents, the millions of Ohioans that visit our cities each year, our regions, and the Ohio economy.

We support the modest increase in the Local Government Fund from 1.7 to 1.75 percent of total GRF. However, the total allocation is still far lower than what it was in previous decades. For our larger cities, these LGF dollars are used almost entirely on public safety and the decades of funding reductions have had an impact.

That is why we are **proposing a new, dedicated state fund that would help address public safety costs and support our local first responders**. This new fund would complement the LGF by dedicating an additional .5 percent of the state GRF to municipalities and townships with full time police and fire departments. It would be allocated through a formula that would provide a proportional percentage based on the localities total annual police and fire payroll. Currently, Ohio cities collectively pay over \$3 billion annually for police and fire payroll, this new dedicated public safety fund would help support these personnel costs and other non-payroll public safety expenses. In doing so, the state can help our cities reduce crime, improve public safety, and support our local first responders.

MAINTAIN LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING FUNDING, CANNABIS HOST COMMUNITY FUND

Ohio law requires Ohio peace officers and troopers to receive between 24 and 40 hours of continued professional training (CPT) per year. We participated in the work of the Ohio Law Enforcement Training Study Commission in 2022 and continue to support its recommendations. However, as the Study Commission noted in its report: “CPT has been sporadically funded and inconsistently implemented in Ohio. As a result, other than firearms recertification, many officers receive little or no CPT some years. When the state does not provide the funding, officers are not required to take the training.”

We are pleased to see that the House version of HB 96 **maintains \$30-35 million in funding for CPT requirements for local law enforcement agencies**. We believe that a dedicated funding stream for CPT remains a long-term need for our cities and local law enforcement agencies, and though we don’t have a preference as to whether that funding comes from a specific tax source or the general revenue fund, we appreciate that Gov. DeWine and the General Assembly have prioritized this funding. We would like to see it **continue at least at its \$40 million** annual allocation.

We appreciate the House restoring a portion of the cannabis host community fund at 20 percent. However, we are urging the Senate to **increase the cannabis host community fund to its current level of 36 percent** of state excise tax revenue as it considers marijuana tax revenue distribution changes.

There are many funding needs, but local governments have made local policy decisions about allowing marijuana dispensaries in their communities based on the promise of being able to use tax revenue from the host community fund to bolster local needs - including, most crucially, public safety.

IMPROVED HOUSING, BROWNFIELD FUNDING, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Our members were pleased to provide feedback that led to substantive **updates to the Welcome Home Ohio program** in Am. Sub. HB 96. We support additional collaborative efforts to ensure that state and local programs to rehabilitate, repair, and build local housing across Ohio are robustly funded as our state's housing needs grow and shift to accommodate economic development and business growth.

The Ohio Mayors Alliance also supports the inclusion of **\$2.5 million for the new Housing Accelerator Grant Program**. This program would provide grant funding to townships and municipalities that adopt 3 pro-housing policies. This incentive-based approach for localities is the right way to foster state and local collaboration on a critical priority like housing. We would like to see this fund amount increased.

Brownfield remediation has fueled redevelopment in some of our cities' most underserved and needy communities. We are grateful for the House's allocation of **\$250 million for the Brownfield Remediation Fund**, and we urge the Senate to maintain this allocation. We also strongly support **increased funding for the Historic Building Preservation Tax Credit**, which especially benefits Ohio's legacy cities and core city neighborhoods. Finally, we urge the Senate to restore statewide funding to the **Ohio Housing Trust Fund**, as that fund serves as an important financing component for the regional, multi-county housing developments our metropolitan regions need.

SUPPORT HOME RULE AND PRESERVING LOCAL CONTROL

The state operating budget is neither the time nor place to enact policies preempting local control. To the extent there are disagreements between Ohio's chartered municipalities and counties and the state regarding local and statewide regulation and policy choices, we believe that such conflicts must be resolved via robust public debate that is informed by research, data, and input from entities and Ohioans impacted by such policies. This is why we are concerned about two preemptions in the House-passed version of Am. Sub. HB 96, such as a provision that would prohibit charter municipalities from regulating electric fencing.

We also urge the Senate to **remove the provision that would prohibit/preempt local governments from using eminent domain, consistent with local needs, to create recreational trails**. As we have said before, local elected officials who are closest to the people they serve are in the best position to make the call about when to use local development tools like eminent domain. Furthermore, eminent domain is an extreme remedy that is already quite limited in function and use. However, it is also a necessary development tool that requires local flexibility, not a blanket statewide standard.

PRESERVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FISCAL STABILITY AND COLLABORATION

Our cities' success is mutually dependent on the fiscal stability and strength of our sister political subdivisions, including our public-school districts, public libraries, and other local government entities. Together, we make up Ohio's distinctive regions and serve diverse populations whose residents deserve to have a voice in sharing the policy choices of the governments closest to them. Without robust state partnership to ensure that all of our state and local institutions function together well, none of us can be as successful as we would like. Thus, we urge you to ensure that investments for public school districts, public libraries, and local governments remain consistent, steady, and robust.

CONCLUSION

The provisions and suggestions outlined above support safer cities and a stronger Ohio economy. We believe that all Ohioans benefit from a pragmatic, bipartisan approach to allocating and prioritizing our state's resources in ways that serve our common interests and foster local and statewide collaboration. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to work with the state to support our cities and the millions of Ohioans who live and work within them.