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**House Bill 96 Interested Party Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
Kathleen McGarvey, Vice Chair
Alliance of Ohio Legal Aids
June 6, 2025**



Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Kate McGarvey, and I am the Executive Director of Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio. I also have the honor of working with my Legal Aid Society colleagues and serve as Vice Chair of our membership organization, the Alliance of Ohio Legal Aids (Alliance).

The Alliance of Ohio Legal Aids is a collaboration among Ohio's regional nonprofit Legal Aid Societies. Collectively, we serve every county in Ohio. We provide high quality free civil legal assistance to low-income Ohioans. You can see the list of our members at the conclusion of this testimony.

In 2024, Alliance members served over 140,000 Ohioans including over 60,000 children, 19,000 seniors, 18,000 people with disabilities, 5,300 domestic violence survivors, 4,700 households impacted by the opioid crisis, and 3,700 veterans.

We have been grateful to the Ohio State Legislature, which for the last five general assemblies has allocated a \$1 million per year cash transfer from the General Revenue Fund to the Legal Aid Fund. This GRF funding has been earmarked to serve the civil legal needs of income-eligible veterans and people impacted by the opioid epidemic, two groups of clients who require extra outreach and services to resolve legal issues.

We ask that you restore that \$1million/annual allocation that benefits veterans and opioid impacted Ohioans by including Senator Theresa Gavarone's amendment SC2611 in the forthcoming omnibus amendment to the HB 96 sub bill.

Of the 3,700+ cases in which Ohio legal aid firms represented veterans in 2024, we found the most common challenges your veteran constituents faced were housing related. From rental property negligence to housing discrimination, mortgage foreclosure to unlawful mobile home park practices, Ohio's veterans come to legal aid for help maintaining one of the most basic needs: a safe, affordable place to live.

Addressing civil legal issues can be life changing. For low-income Ohioans like Kimberley, not having legal ownership of their home can mean the loss of financial and housing stability. Kimberly, a disabled Air Force veteran,

regularly made the trip from her rental in Columbus to visit her Aunt Carol in Frankfort to help with housekeeping and grocery shopping. When her aunt passed away, Kimberley's cousins agreed she should inherit Carol's house even though the will gave it to several relatives. With their encouragement, Kimberley moved into the home. But when she began paying the mortgage, she learned that her aunt had been behind on payments. Kimberley attempted to negotiate with the lender but was unable to because she was not the borrower. She called legal aid for help. Over the next several months a legal aid attorney worked with Kimberly to collect the waivers from various family members that she would need to file with the court and successfully transfer the home into her name. Kimberley told us that she would not have been able to own a home if it were not for help from legal aid.

This is just one example of how legal aid helps veterans. After housing needs, the most common civil legal issues we assist veterans with relate to aging, including preparing wills and advanced directives, securing safe home-based or long-term care, and accessing Medicare and social security, as well as the Veteran benefits they earned by serving our country.

Including Senator Theresa Gavarone's amendment SC2611 in the budget omnibus amendment would continue Ohio's tradition of ensuring that our veterans have access to the civil legal services they need to stay housed, access healthcare, and age with dignity.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about our life-changing work.

Sincerely,

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Members of the Alliance of Ohio Legal Aids

- Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.
- Community Legal Aid
- The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland
- Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
- Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC
- Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio
- Legal Aid of Western Ohio
- Northeast Ohio Legal Aid
- Ohio Poverty Law Center
- Pro Seniors