

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee Proponent Testimony Amended Substitute House Bill 96

Chair Manchester, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill (Am. Sub. HB) 96, the state operating budget, on behalf of Ohio REALTORS®.

Formed in 1910, Ohio REALTORS® is the state's largest professional trade association with approximately 35,000 members representing both residential and commercial practitioners, as well as auctioneers and appraisers.

Ohio REALTORS® appreciates the House of Representatives for adding an amendment that would clarify provisions passed last session in HB 466, which established the use of written representation agreements in residential real estate transactions. This important legislation, which was supported by Ohio REALTORS® and passed with near unanimous support, has improved transparency in the home buying process and ensures consistent use of agreements by real estate professionals throughout Ohio. Since the bill took effect in October 2024, Ohio REALTORS® has worked closely with the Ohio Division of Real Estate and Professional Licensing to ensure that real estate licensees are informed of the new standard and that it is being implemented as intended by the legislature. Through this process, questions have arisen surrounding some of the terminology used in the bill, as well as confusion over the timing for when written representation agreements must be entered. Am. Sub. HB 96 would make clarifying changes addressing these questions, and we urge support.

As you are all aware, far too many homeowners are facing unsustainable property tax increases that are driven by rising property valuations. Many families – especially those on fixed incomes – are struggling to keep up with these growing tax bills, and we have seen more and more homeowners at risk of financial hardship or even displacement from their homes. This burden is exacerbated by Ohio's property tax system, particularly the impact of the 20-mill floor and exemptions from House Bill (HB) 920's tax reduction factors, which have allowed for unvoted increases in property taxes. The House-passed version of Am. Sub. HB 96 attempts to provide property tax relief by requiring county budget commissions to reduce the property tax rates of residents within school districts that have carry-over balances that exceed 30% of the previous fiscal year's expenditures. Ohio REALTORS® continues to urge lawmakers to consider provisions that reform Ohio's 20-mill floor and improve HB 920 protections to ensure they are shielding homeowners from spikes in property tax increases as it was originally intended. Pending legislation like SB 66 and HB 129, as well as HB 186, aim to reduce unvoted spikes in property tax increases and give voters more control over decisions that will result in higher property taxes.

Related to property taxes, Ohio REALTORS® support language added by the House of Representatives that would address reforms enacted by HB 126 in 2022, dealing with property valuation complaints. The language in AM. Sub. HB 96 strengthens the intent of HB 126 to stem political subdivision complaints against property owners, specifically by limiting the extent to which school boards can act through third-party individuals. This change will protect property owners from excessive tax appeals initiated by school boards and will fulfill the original intent of HB 126.

It is no secret that Ohio has a crisis-level housing shortage across the state. Nationally, it is estimated that the underbuilding gap in the U.S. totaled more than 5.5 million housing units in the last 20 years.¹ In Ohio, we have a shortage of nearly 270,000 affordable rental units and over 100,000 single-family units. As a result of the shortage, we have seen the cost of housing skyrocket. We appreciate that Am. Sub. HB 96 makes improvements to the Welcome Home Ohio Program, which has been instrumental in helping increase the supply of affordable single-family homes for income-eligible Ohioans. In the last operating budget (HB 33), the legislature created this program to address the critical housing shortage facing the state. Although still in its infancy, the Welcome Home Ohio Program has helped more Ohioans achieve the dream of homeownership by awarding \$60 million for the construction of 440 homes throughout the state. Ohio REALTORS® supports Am. Sub. HB 96 as it makes improvements to the Welcome Home Ohio Program by expanding eligibility to qualified non-profit organizations to apply for program funds directly. The substitute bill also makes improvements to the operations of the program. By making these changes, lawmakers will continue to grow the Welcome Home Ohio Program and ensure that it continues to provide homeownership opportunities to more Ohioans.

Ohio REALTORS® also supports the Housing Accelerator Fund proposed in the House-passed version of Am. Sub. HB 96. This fund provides \$2.5 million each fiscal year to local governments that have adopted pro-housing policies such as reducing parking requirements, repealing minimum lot size requirements, increasing housing density, incentivizing modular and manufactured housing options, expediting permitting, and developing a pre-approval process in place for development plans. In March, Ohio REALTORS® and the Greater Ohio Policy Center developed a guidebook that offers voluntary tools that local governments, developers, and others can use to overcome barriers to housing development ([Housing Ohio: Tools for Development](#)). The Housing Accelerator Fund will provide incentives to local governments to implement the pro-housing tools we developed, which will reduce barriers to housing construction and promote more homes being built in Ohio.

Lastly, Ohio REALTORS® questions changes made in Am. Sub. HB 96 to the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. The proposed change would eliminate state oversight of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and divert it to each individual county. Allowing the state to administer the program, as opposed to each individual county, enables the Ohio Housing Trust Fund to maximize resources to those communities with the greatest needs. Ohio REALTORS® has supported the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, and we urge lawmakers to work to ensure its resources are being utilized to their fullest potential to provide housing services to those in need.

Thank you for taking these comments on behalf of Ohio REALTORS® into consideration as you review the state operating budget.

Sincerely,



Scott Williams
Chief Executive Officer
Ohio REALTORS®

¹ [RCG: Housing is Critical Infrastructure: Social and Economic Benefits of Building More Housing](#)