

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, I am Jennifer Westfall, Aging and Health Director, Buckeye Hills Regional Council.

As with other Ohio Area Agencies on Aging, Buckeye Hills Regional Council (BHRC) provides services and resources for individuals to remain in their homes and communities as they age. We assist with meeting needs such as meals, transportation, personal care, homemaker and housing modifications. These services and supports can be life altering for the individuals we assist but even with our efforts, housing continues to be one of the biggest challenges for our rural region. Often keeping an individual in their home may be the best available option but the home may have barriers that need to be addressed.

BHRC works to address these barriers by utilizing the Ohio Housing Trust Fund grant program and leveraging those funds with partner organizations and programs such as Habitat for Humanity, USDA and local community action agencies throughout the eight-county region we represent.

BHRC and the Ohio Housing Trust Fund continues to have a tangible impact on individuals' lives. With this funding, BHRC has installed a ramp on a home for an individual whose daughter was having to carry her on her back in order to exit the residence; completed a bathroom modification for a gentleman who could reach through his exterior wall while showering because of the gaps in the walls; repaired floors that were disintegrating under a homeowner's feet; restored roofs that were near collapse, just to name a few. Each of these projects allowed an individual to remain in their home where they want to be, where they continue to be a part of their community and where they can continue to live independently.

The proposed county-by-county approach would be inefficient and costly, and hinder local agencies' ability to braid and blend funding streams to expand the reach of these needed resources; negatively impacting the number of individuals that are able to be assisted and to remain in their homes.

We ask that you restore the current funding structure of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and institute a study committee composed of legislators, organizations and representatives of the DeWine Administration in order to evaluate the current structure prior to making changes that could produce a negative impact.

