

Josh Barkan, M/I Homes, Inc.
Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 184 (Reynolds)
Senate Housing Committee
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Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 184. My name is Josh Barkan, and I am representing M/I Homes, Inc, a national homebuilding company headquartered and founded here in Columbus, Ohio. Since our founding in 1976, M/I Homes has constructed more than 140,000 homes across 17 markets in the United States. Here in Ohio, our footprint is especially strong, and we strive to meet the growing demand for new, attainable housing options.

Senate Bill 184 incentivizes the exact types of reforms essential to deliver housing quickly and effectively in response to Ohio's ongoing economic growth. Across multiple communities in Ohio, the homebuilding industry continues to face a growing set of barriers that make it increasingly difficult to deliver the housing our state urgently needs. Chief among these challenges are inconsistent and outdated zoning policies that restrict higher-density or more affordable housing options, often preventing practical development proposals from moving forward. Even when communities express interest in housing development, permitting processes are often delayed for months or even years, thereby creating uncertainty and driving up costs. At the same time, infrastructure expenses such as water and sewer extensions, connection fees, and utility access make otherwise viable housing sites financially impractical, particularly in jurisdictions that lack coordination or access to capital improvement funding.

In one example, we are aware of a community that actually did invest in its sewer infrastructure and is now interested in investing further in its community but is fiscally unable to move forward on many of its preferred initiatives because the community is overburdened by the debt service on the sewer infrastructure. A modest grant through this program associated with a new housing project could put this community on the path to success.

In other areas, we've encountered sites where high utility tap fees have made development out of reach, and others where their regulatory environment is so burdensome that builders are deterred from even entering the market. Despite large-scale job growth nearby, housing production is simply not keeping pace because the system to support it doesn't exist yet. These are the types of local-level impediments that this legislation can help overcome.

Senate Bill 184 addresses this challenge head-on by establishing Residential Economic Development Districts (REDDs). Under the bill, when a major economic development project of

\$700 million or more is announced, a 20-mile radius surrounding that investment becomes a REDD. Within that district:

- Counties, municipalities, or townships may apply for grants from the newly created Housing Accelerator Fund.
- These grants support a range of activities that include land acquisition and site preparation to infrastructure upgrades and capital for housing development.
- The grants are performance-based: political subdivisions must show that they have both approved or are going to approve a workforce housing project and adopted “pro-housing” policies.

The bill defines “pro-housing” policies that include:

- Streamlined and expedited permitting processes.
- Fee reductions or eliminations for inspections and plan reviews.
- Zoning changes to permit higher density, smaller lot sizes, minimal side yard setbacks, and reduced parking requirements.
- Expanded utility access and site readiness planning.
- Use of innovative housing types.

What makes Senate Bill 184 especially meaningful is that it motivates local action without overriding local control. It empowers communities to respond to economic development in a way that reflects both urgency and opportunity by providing a flexible, incentive-based model that respects local decision-making and addresses zoning modernization and development partnerships to unlock new housing.

M/I Homes appreciates the leadership of Senator Reynolds in offering this legislation and urges strong support for Senate Bill 184. It is a practical, targeted approach to one of the most pressing challenges facing Ohio’s economic future. By enacting this legislation, the state can help facilitate the construction of thousands of workforce homes across the entire state that would not otherwise be built, ensuring that the next generation of Ohio’s workforce has a place to call home near the jobs they’re helping to create.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.