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Senate Bill 184  
**Residential Economic Development District (REDD) grants**  
*Proponent Testimony*  
May 13, 2025

Chairman Reynolds, Vice Chair Timken, and Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 184.

My name is Jim Kinnick, and I am the Executive Director of Eastgate Regional Council of Governments (Eastgate) in Youngstown. Eastgate covers Ashtabula, Mahoning, and Trumbull Counties and the Youngstown-Warren metropolitan area’s Mahoning Valley. The Mahoning Valley is a post-industrial region that for decades suffered from disinvestment and population loss, but the region has begun to rebound and is now in the early stages of an economic recovery that is only possible with the rapid expansion of our local housing supply.

Our work with the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber over the past several years identified the need to examine shortages in our regional housing supply given an influx of major economic development projects in our region including Foxconn, Home Goods, Ultium Cells, and Kimberly-Clark. To address this housing shortage, last year Eastgate commissioned our first-ever Regional Housing Plan prepared by the Greater Ohio Policy Center and the Reinvestment Fund. On January 16, 2025, Eastgate rolled out the Regional Housing Plan which culminated in a multifaceted implementation strategy that we are already busy executing. One of the key elements of the implementation strategy is creating financial incentives for residential developers as it currently costs more to build a house in our region than it can be sold for in the current market.

At our region’s first Lake to River Economic Development annual meeting last week, JobsOhio shared that 20,000 new jobs will be coming online in the near future due to anticipated growth in our advanced manufacturing and aerospace sectors. This exciting news is tempered by the reality that our region does not currently have the requisite housing units to accommodate this influx of skilled workforce. If new housing is not constructed in our region, these new major project wins will poach employees from our existing companies looking to stay and expand in the region. The time is now for the state to act to support post-industrial and Appalachian regions like ours that require additional layers of financial incentives that enable the private market to actively participate in the rebuilding of our housing stock.

We applaud Senator Reynolds for recognizing the need for critical workforce housing investments to support major economic development projects like those taking place in Eastern Ohio. Eastgate is a strong proponent of Senate Bill 184 and the creation of Residential Economic Development District



(REDD) grants. We offer the following suggestions to maximize the impact of the program and ensure that distressed Appalachian regions like ours are able to leverage its full potential given our unique challenges in market conditions and local government tax base and institutional capacity:

- **Enabling Councils of Governments (COGs) and Port Authorities to be applicants for REDD grants** – Many of our region’s local government tax bases have been decimated by years of industrial job loss due to automation and the offshoring of manufacturing operations. As a result of this long-term disinvestment, most of our member communities lack economic development or community planning staff. As such, Eastgate has stepped up to provide technical assistance in the communities and has the staff, capacity, and proven track record of administering and delivering state grant-funded projects.
- **Creating a Dedicated Set-Aside for Appalachian communities** – Given Senator Reynolds’s target goal of \$50 million for the REDD grants program, we feel a 20% set-aside for Ohio’s Appalachian communities would ensure that Appalachian communities, which require additional layers of incentive given market conditions, will be able to participate in the program and fully leverage its intended impact. The set-aside will also give adequate time for communities with limited staff to coordinate with regional partner applicants on their specific local housing needs.
- **Giving Preferential Grant Application Scoring Treatment to Communities with a completed Regional Housing Strategy** – Giving preferential treatment to REDD grant applicants who have completed a Housing Plan within the last five (5) years would ensure grant funds are awarded to communities who have done their due diligence and are implementing projects and programs supported by quantitative data and stakeholder input. In addition, communities who have completed a Regional Housing Plan consisting of two or more counties should be given extra points in their REDD application scoring given the geographic reach of their project will stretch further and positively impact housing in more communities within the REDD.

Eastgate Regional Council of Governments appreciates the opportunity to participate in the May 12 Interested Parties meeting, as well as this opportunity to provide detailed feedback in the form of written proponent testimony.

Please feel free to contact my office with any questions regarding Eastgate’s need for this catalytic investment in Ohio’s workforce housing. We strongly support the passage of Senate Bill 184 and the creation of the Residential Economic Development District (REDD) grant program.



James Kinnick, P.E.  
Executive Director

