

Thank you for your time this afternoon.

My name is Scott Ellsworth. I am a CPA, a business owner and a real estate investor involved in both commercial space and residential housing. Today, however, I speak to you in my role as President of the Ohio Real Estate Investors Association (OREIA).

OREIA represents 13 chapters and thousands of real estate investors across Ohio—many of whom are local housing providers. Our members work hard every day to improve their communities and offer quality housing to Ohioans. They are a vital part of the housing ecosystem and local business community, and it's essential that we support them with common sense solutions.

One significant challenge our members face is the burden of unpaid water and sewer bills. When service is not shut off and a resident eventually moves out, housing providers are often left responsible for hundreds—and sometimes thousands—of dollars in overdue water and sewer charges.

This adds substantial cost to local housing. Which then gets past on to new residents in higher rents. The cost of housing is then getting more expensive for residents. Many of whom are having trouble even today to afford housing. By not passing this bill, you are raising the cost of housing.

The previous testimony last year by the water companies is just false.

First, they testified that we are in a better position to screen our residents for them. With today's technology that is just not true. The gas and electric company and the cable company can screen their customers and collect. Why can't the water companies do the same? Make their customer pay a deposit, cut their service off when they don't pay after one month?

Second, they suggested that we can set security deposit amounts to account for the water risk. And they cannot? Ohio Landlord-Tenant Law discourages any deposit greater than one month's rent, which is not even sufficient to cover the costs of a bad move out. Also, increased deposits hurt all of those who struggle to pay the security deposit and their first month's rent.

Third, they said they will shut off the water when we call. Just not true, and they know it. Us asking for the water to be shut off is effectively an illegal eviction by us. Violating Landlord-Tenant Law.

Senate Bill 118 presents a commonsense solution. Utility bills should be the responsibility of the person who contracts for the service. They should not become the responsibility of a person who did not contract for the service.

Don't let the water companies continue to increase the housing costs of everyone else. We are tired of the water companies being lazy because they know it doesn't matter to them if a tenant does not pay their bill. Why wouldn't they be lazy? They know the housing provider gets stuck with it. They have no incentive.

We urge you to vote YES on SB118—both in the committee and on the Senate floor—and help us put common sense in place and keep Ohioans safely and affordably housed.

Thank you for your time.