



**House State & Local Government Committee
Proponent Testimony, House Bill 598 (West-Green)
Jason E. Warner, Greater Ohio Policy Center
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Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes and members of the State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 598, legislation that will make a small but important change to state law concerning forfeited land sales in the state of Ohio.

My name is Jason Warner and I am the Manager of Government Affairs at the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC). Greater Ohio is a nonprofit nonpartisan organization that is valued for its data-driven research. Our mission is to champion revitalization in Ohio to create economically competitive communities. It is with this mission in mind that Greater Ohio first approached Representatives West and Green concerning House Bill 598 (HB598).

HB598 proposes to change state law to permit county auditors to hold forfeited land sales at a time of their choosing, rather than once annually as currently required under statute. Forfeited land sales concern properties that have been foreclosed upon for delinquent taxes and have been offered at Sheriff's Sale on two separate occasions for the total amount of taxes, assessments, penalties and interest due, plus cost. Not sold for want of bidders, the properties were forfeited to the state by court order and remanded to the county auditor for sale.

Properties that are sold at forfeited land sales are not available for inspection prior to their sale by the general public, though public entities who have the opportunity to acquire the properties prior to a forfeited land sale do have access for inspection. Because most prospective purchasers are unable to inspect properties, often times they find after the sale that a property may have far more deficiencies than they had planned when making the purchase. As a result, these properties often slip back into delinquency and end up back on a forfeited land sales list.

This vicious cycle of neglect results in blighted neighborhoods with little hope for revitalization. Because current law mandates county auditors hold these sales annually, there is no ability to hold the properties and slow the cycle. Enactment of HB598 will allow county auditors to hold sales when they deem them necessary, and will permit entities like county land banks to acquire the properties and do the necessary revitalization work to turn the properties into community assets instead of blights.

HB598 also includes an additional provision which, with enactment, will create parity between county and city land banks. Under current law, a county land bank can hold properties indefinitely without the necessity of offering the properties for sale at an auction. City land banks however, are required to offer properties for sale at an auction after 15 years. This discrepancy exists because the statutes were enacted at different times (city land banks predate county land banks). HB598 eliminates the requirement to offer properties for sale at an auction after 15 years, thereby creating uniformity under state law concerning land bank-held properties.

HB598 has been in the works for several years, originating from the work of the Ohio Revitalization Steering Committee, a task force consisting of representatives from county land banks, financial institutions, and nonprofit groups concerned with community and neighborhood health and revitalization. Greater Ohio is privileged to have the opportunity to spearhead this task force and to lead the way for the development for HB598 in its present form.

Chair Anielski and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for your thoughtful consideration of House Bill 598. Thanks also to Representatives Thomas West and Doug Green for their willingness to sponsor this legislation which will do much to improve neighborhoods throughout Ohio and the overall quality of life across the state. I appreciate the opportunity to share this information and background concerning the bill would welcome any questions that the committee may have.