



April 26, 2021

Proponent Testimony in Support of H.B. 182

Honorable Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Members of the Ohio House of Representatives' Civil Justice Committee, and HB 182 Sponsors, Rep. Upchurch and Rep. Miller,

Please accept this letter in support of House Bill 182, proposed legislation that would prohibit housing providers from discriminating against tenants based on not whether they can pay their rent, but on the means by which they will pay it – particularly with respect to the use of federal rental vouchers, or subsidies, for rent. The Fair Housing Center for Rights & Research is a not for profit fair housing agency that promotes equal housing opportunities throughout Northeast Ohio. Our mission is to protect and expand fair housing rights, eliminate housing discrimination, and promote integrated communities. We advance our mission through enforcement, advocacy, education and research. We are writing to express our strong organizational support for House Bill (HB) 182.

Source of income (SOI) discrimination occurs when a housing provider refuses to rent to a potential tenant based on the tenant's source of income. Housing providers may reject a rental application because the tenant's income includes a rent subsidy such as a Housing Choice Voucher (formerly known as Section 8), veterans' voucher (VASH), Supplemental Security Income, Social Security, and even emergency rental assistance. At The Fair Housing Center, our advocates receive a significant number of calls from families and individuals each year who struggle to find safe, affordable housing to rent using their Housing Choice Voucher (HCV).

Source of income protection is a matter of racial justice. In Cuyahoga County, more than 90% of the 16,000+ households using HCVs are Black. Research by The Fair Housing Center shows that ***Cuyahoga County housing providers***, with units outside of areas of housing voucher concentration, ***refuse to accept housing vouchers 92.1% of the time***. Some housing providers who put "no section 8" in their rental ads are more likely to engage in racial discrimination.¹

One in seven Black renter households in Cuyahoga County rents with the assistance of an HCV. When landlords in Cuyahoga County refuse to accept a housing voucher, they are denying housing to 14.2% of all Black households who rent in our county. National research shows that voucher program participants with children in the Cleveland metro region have fewer housing choices and are more racially segregated than their peers.²

We are in a housing affordability crisis. When housing providers refuse to accept vouchers, one of our largest affordable housing resources goes to waste. The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) provides the vast majority of HCVs in Cuyahoga County. CMHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) had a success rate of 78.5% at the end of 2019, meaning that for every 100 vouchers issued to families, only 78.5 households successfully leased a home with their voucher; ***nearly 1/4 families who received a voucher, were unable to utilize it, and returned the voucher to CMHA to be issued to another family***. Often individuals wait years to have the opportunity to receive this life changing voucher, only to ultimately be denied the opportunity to use it after an extended housing search with often costly application fees.

¹ <https://www.thehousingcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SOFH-2021.pdf>

² <https://www.thehousingcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SOFH-2021.pdf>

Low-income families and individuals who utilize Housing Choice Vouchers often experience significant financial setbacks due to source of income discrimination. Many people with vouchers have to apply multiple times for housing, paying application fees each time, until their application is selected and yet they are frequently passed up by housing providers who prefer to rent to someone without a voucher. SOI discrimination especially hurts families with children, veterans, people of color, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations. The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority alone administers housing vouchers to 586 veterans. Children under the age of 18 account for 1/3 of all people assisted by Housing Choice Vouchers. Nearly 40% of all Housing Choice Voucher households are headed by people living with disabilities.

Source of income discrimination also poses obstacles to families trying to overcome homelessness. As family homelessness increases across the state, those fortunate enough to have the opportunity to receive Rapid Rehousing rental vouchers are delayed in exiting county shelters. In turn, families may be left couch surfing or being placed back in shelters, which currently can increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Source of income protections are invaluable in maximizing people's ability to secure safe and decent housing. Furthermore, SOI protections are effective policies for mitigating discrimination. A comprehensive study by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) showed that in cities with SOI protection, landlords were less likely to deny housing vouchers than in cities without SOI protection.³ Recent research has also found that in jurisdictions with SOI protections families and individuals with HCV's have greater success utilizing their vouchers housing authorities have higher rates of HCV utilization.⁴ Access to safe, decent housing is an ongoing challenge throughout the State of Ohio. Adding SOI protections will give families and individuals remove a significant obstacle uniquely faced by Ohio's low-income renter households and provide a pathway for them access safe, affordable housing in their communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments and this critical legislation. Please contact me with any questions you may have at 216-361-9240, Ext. 204 or by email to cpleasants@thehousingcenter.org.

Respectfully,



Carrie A. Pleasants
Executive Director

³ https://www.huduser.gov/publications/pdf/freeman_impactlaws_assistedhousingrcr06.pdf

⁴ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/prohibiting-discrimination-against-renters-using-housing-vouchers-improves-results>