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Testimony in Support of HB 182
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House Civil Justice Committee
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Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Megan O’Dell, and I am an attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center advocates for evidence-based policies that protect and expand the rights of low-income Ohioans. We are a non-profit law firm working closely with Ohio’s legal aid community, serving Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 182, to prohibit discrimination in rental housing based on lawful source of income.

As of 2019, over 229,000 households in Ohio used a federal housing voucher to help pay their rent. However, landlords can refuse to rent to a housing voucher holder in most areas of the state.¹ HB 182 would change this by prohibiting a landlord to refuse to rent to an individual or family based on their source of income. This bill would not require landlords to rent at a lower rate; it would simply prohibit a landlord from not accepting federal or state rental assistance. Over 18 states and many counties and cities across the U.S. have laws that prohibit this type of discrimination, including Virginia, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Utah.² Some municipalities in Ohio also have ordinances that prohibit source of income discrimination, such as Toledo, Columbus, Cincinnati, Bexley, and Westerville. These laws have been found to make a difference. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) found that landlords are less likely to deny a voucher in areas where these laws exist, and voucher holders are more likely to use their vouchers.³

Legal Aid attorneys across the state assist clients who are denied housing due to their source of income. One client in Northwest Ohio, a Black mother and grandmother taking care of her children and grandchild, struggled for several months before finding safe housing from a landlord who agreed to rent to her. Had Ohio had a source of income anti-discrimination law, her client would have found safe housing much quicker. When landlords can refuse to rent to voucher holders, families end up clustered in high-poverty areas with higher crime rates, lower educational opportunities, and health hazards, such as lead poisoning.⁴

Many are directly harmed when anti-discrimination source of income laws do not exist. Those with Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, Veterans Benefits, Disability Benefits Payments, and Social

¹ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3380463

² <https://www.prrac.org/pdf/AppendixB.pdf>

³ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3380463

⁴ *Id.*

Security Supplemental Security Income can be denied housing based on their source of income. And at a time when many are out of work due to COVID-19, landlords can refuse to rent to individuals who receive unemployment compensation.⁵ Black, Indigenous, and people of color are most harmed when landlords refuse to rent to voucher holders. In Cuyahoga County, 90% of voucher holders are Black. 28% are adults with disabilities, 80% are women, and 38% are households with children.⁶ In Columbus, 58% of voucher holders are Black, making voucher discrimination a proxy for racial discrimination.⁷

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB182. I urge the passage of this bill to prohibit source of income discrimination.

⁵ <https://ohiohome.org/documents/SOI-FAQs.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.prrac.org/pdf/AppendixB.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/2021/03/09/columbus-city-council-tells-landlords-drop-no-section-8-attitude/4636807001/>