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To: Ohio House State & Local Government Committee

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Subject: HB 237 - Supporting Transparency of Public Records to Help Empower Ohio Consumers with More and Better Information on Housing and the Real Estate Market

Chairperson Wiggam, Vice Chairperson John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Zillow in support of HB 237, which would increase transparency and support reasonable access to public records to help empower Ohio consumers with more and better information on housing and the real estate market.

As part of our core values at Zillow, we strive to “turn on the lights” by empowering consumers with data and information on housing and the real estate market. Whether an Ohio consumer is looking to buy, sell, rent or finance their next home, we seek through all of our platforms to provide them with the information they need to make more educated and informed choices in their search for the next chapter of their life in housing.

Zillow engages directly with state and local government offices and third party data providers across the United States to acquire public records data relating to real estate, which is used to power the information that is provided to consumers free of charge on Zillow, Trulia and other Zillow Group platforms. This public records data includes both property tax assessment (assessed values and total property taxes paid) and real estate transaction data (deeds, real estate documents, mortgage filings, etc.).

Powered in part by this public records data, Zillow displays this data and information free of charge on the home details page of almost every U.S. property (even if the home is not listed for sale). In a simple, easy to use interface, any consumer can pull up almost any home and be provided at no charge with a detailed historical record of the property tax information (including both the assessed value and the amount of property taxes paid) and the real estate sales history of the property (in jurisdictions where we are allowed to publish this data).

Zillow also uses this public record data to provide important economic and housing research to state and local governments, non-profit partners and university researchers across the United States (again free of charge). Through Zillow’s Assessor and Real Estate database (ZTRAX), researchers with over 150 different government agencies and universities have used this data to complete important economic and housing research projects. Numerous Ohio government agencies, non-profit organizations and university researchers have utilized this free data source to conduct important economic and housing research.

If enacted, we believe that HB 237 would significantly increase the transparency of public real estate documents and records for Ohio consumers, which would empower them with more and better information on housing and the real estate market. In addition, we believe that HB 237 would enhance the ability of Ohio businesses, including financial institutions, real estate professionals and title insurance providers, to provide more efficient and effective service to Ohio consumers who are seeking help with one of the most important financial decisions of their lives - the decision to buy, sell, rent or finance their next home.

In closing, we would respectfully request that the members of the House State and Local Government Committee support HB 237. We would also like to express our appreciation to Representative Hillyer and the Ohio Recorders Association for all the hard work they have done to put together this very important legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this very important issue.