



Written Testimony for the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

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Senate Bill 193 – Interested Party Testimony

Chairman McColley and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony regarding Senate Bill 193. I'm Nate Coffman, Executive Director of the Ohio CDC Association, a statewide membership organization of local non-profits (community development corporations) that work to revitalize their neighborhoods.

Currently in Ohio unpaid water charges can be collected by the county auditor in the same manner as property taxes. This can unfortunately lead to the subsequent foreclosure of homes. Beginning a couple of decades ago Ohio became the unfortunate epicenter of the foreclosure crisis that resulted in a decrease in the state's homeownership rate compared to pre-Great Recession and persistent racial disparities in homeownership especially among African Americans. Most recently rapidly accelerating home prices have created another type of homeownership crisis. All of this has made the American Dream more out of reach for everyday Ohioans. These challenges beg the question as to whether water departments across the state should also be involved in triggering foreclosures. I think they should not and alternative means should be utilized to collect on outstanding water bills. Foreclosure should not be the end result when it comes to water. Ohio's water departments should not be in the business of foreclosure.

Recently the Cleveland Department of Water and their metering subcontractor Itron has received local media attention for miscalibrated water meters leading to astronomic bills unable to be paid for by homeowners. Media has documented that the department in 2021 alone paid \$1.4 million in legal fees defending allegations of unfair billing. The department filed 11,000 tax liens against homeowners from 2014 – 2018 demonstrating a policy of relying on water tax liens that can lead to foreclosure as a tactic to collect disputed water bills.

Whether it's Cleveland or other departments across the state, a water bill should not turn into the loss of someone's home. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.