Testimony of Katie Kitchin, Director, Corporation for Supportive Housing
Concerning HB 228 and Permanent Supportive Housing
December 4, 2018

Good evening Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input with respect to HB 228 and its potential impact on Permanent Supportive Housing programs. My organization, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, manages several statewide supportive housing programs and provides support and training to permanent supportive housing providers across Ohio, where we have served state and local governments for more than 15 years. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the particular concerns about the application of the House-passed bill on these permanent supportive housing programs.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) refers to non-time limited rental assistance with intensive, but voluntary services that is offered to individuals who would be homeless without the assistance and would be unable to remain housed without the services. PSH is a common intervention in Ohio employed to end chronic homelessness among individuals and families with serious mental illness and other disabling conditions that limit their ability to obtain or remain in housing. There are over 14,000 people in Ohio residing in Supportive Housing units who would otherwise be staying in shelters or attempting to survive unsheltered in our communities.

A large portion of the 14,000 PSH units in Ohio are operated with support from the Housing Choice Voucher program, or other Housing Assistance Payment contracts that are identified in HB 228, Sec. 5321.01 (P). The provision in question would prohibit these PSH operators from imposing weapons bans or otherwise interfering with the ownership, possession, and use of firearms in housing units/facilities that serve people with serious mental illness. This provision would unnecessarily pose a serious risk of harm to the service providers, property management staff, visitors, and residents of PSH programs.

While most PSH tenants are not violent, many do suffer from periods of decompensation during which time they may pose a threat to themselves or others. Without the ability of PSH operators to restrict the possession and use of firearms to these residents, we have significant concerns about our ability to recruit and retain quality staff to deliver services in PSH environments when their safety cannot be assured. If we cannot adequately staff PSH programs, our statewide progress to reduce homelessness is at risk, and the vulnerable individuals who rely on housing and behavioral health services provided through PSH programs will be in jeopardy.

We ask that you amend the legislation to eliminate this restriction on subsidized housing providers that operate PSH.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.