



**Representative Paula Hicks-Hudson
44th House District**

**House Bill 559 Sponsor Testimony
March 1, 2022**

Chairman Hillyer, Vice-Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 559.

As a former district council member in the City of Toledo, Ohio, I was bombarded by citizens seeking help for nuisance properties in their neighborhoods. As the former Mayor of Toledo, I know what resources our Neighborhoods Department used to identify those properties and the bad actors who made it hard for citizens to live and work in safe neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, the staff had to refer cases to The Toledo Housing Court. Sometimes the conditions were so egregious that cases were filed in the Lucas County Common Pleas Court. While those cases were proper to present in felony court, often times the remedy was no different than what it might have been the outcome from the municipal or misdemeanor court

The Lucas County Land Bank recently completed a survey of every property in Toledo and Washington Township. This survey included 119,000 housing structures. According to the survey, 1,956 vacant lots have become nuisance properties due to lack of upkeep by their owners. 10,660 buildings, mostly homes, have peeling paint or bad siding problems. There are 9,174 buildings that need to have their roof replaced before real damage is caused to the structure.

While property conditions are better than when the first survey was conducted in 2015, we still have a long way to go. The Toledo Municipal Court has been a tool that has helped in that improvement.

I was asked by Judge Joe Howe, of Toledo Municipal Court Housing Division to present this legislation to help him help the citizens. You have a letter from him where he explains better than I what this legislation will be for his ability to address this problem in Toledo.

I want to highlight that this bill will reduce confusion and place these cases in Toledo where they will be heard by one court which has the expertise, staff, and tools to solve the problem either through punishment or rehabilitation.

As you all know Common Pleas judges have criminal dockets that encompass many different types of crimes. And often those criminal cases have higher priority over housing criminal case. Toledo Housing Court is familiar with misdemeanor code violations and can draw on that familiarity when dealing with felony environmental matters. Also, this bill will expand Housing Court's criminal caseload to include felony housing violations. This bill is patterned after the Franklin County Municipal Court's Environmental Court a similar court to Housing Court, which already has felony jurisdiction for environmental cases.

Lastly, I will note for the record that this bill does not have any cost to the state as it addresses a local issue.

Mr. Chair and Members of the Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present HB 559 and I am prepared to answer any questions that members may have.