



Written Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Committee

House Bill 167 – Proponent

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Thank you for the opportunity to express COHHIO's support for House Bill 167 to appropriate federal Covid relief dollars through the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) for emergency rental assistance (ERA) and utility assistance according to the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act that Congress passed in December.

We applaud the legislature for moving quickly to get these dollars out to landlords and tenants who are struggling to make ends meet during this pandemic. We support swift passage of this bill because:

1. **The need is enormous.** Massive pandemic-related job loss continues to disproportionately impact Ohioans working in low-wage jobs, who are overwhelmingly renters.
2. **Renters are at risk.** About 377,000 Ohio households are behind on rent, and over 200,000 are concerned they will get evicted within the next 2 months, according to the most recent data released by the U.S. Census Bureau.
3. **Landlords are at risk.** While the CDC has a moratorium on evictions first issued by the Trump administration last year, that by itself it does not help landlords who still have to pay their bills. Getting ERA distributed quickly helps tenants but also helps property owners with arrearages and rental costs going forward.
4. **Ohio already has an effective rent/utility assistance program.** ODSA created the Home Relief Program last fall to distribute other federal relief dollars for emergency rental, mortgage and utility assistance through local community action agencies. These dollars are helping many at-risk tenants and landlords, but the need far surpasses remaining funding. Your constituents can apply for rental and utility assistance through your local community action agency at: <https://oacaa.org/agency-directory/>.
5. **Ohio has limited amount of time to distribute ERA.** The federal legislation allows the Treasury Secretary to recapture funds not obligated in a timely manner from states and redistribute the money to other likely larger states, like California and New York which are spending these funds more quickly.

The pandemic has magnified how critical it is to have a safe, decent place to call home. This bill will help tens of thousands of Ohio families remain in their own homes where they can stay healthy, go to work, and attend school.