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**Written Proponent Testimony on House Bill 167
House Finance Committee
March 25, 2021
Jason Smith, Associate State Director, AARP Ohio**

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 167 on behalf of AARP. As a nonpartisan, social mission organization representing individuals aged 50-plus with a national membership of 37 million and approximately 1.5 million members in Ohio, AARP is deeply concerned about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Ohioans' ability to secure and maintain affordable housing, especially for those living on low and fixed incomes. We are very pleased that the Ohio General Assembly is moving quickly to provide this critical funding to provide rental assistance to struggling Ohioans and urge committee members' support for HB 167.

This additional funding for emergency rental assistance programs is an important policy to be utilized during the COVID-19 outbreak. With many renters already struggling to meet their basic needs, paying past due rent will be extremely onerous for those who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and who face the financial realities of depleted savings, unemployment, decreased wages, and other factors related to the pandemic.

Losing a home because of financial difficulties can lead to loss of community ties and homelessness, both of which can contribute to a decline in physical and mental health, even without the current pandemic. For older adults, this can also lead to unnecessary and costly institutionalization. During the current crisis, no one should be faced with the additional challenge of losing their home. Access to safe and affordable housing is not only essential during a pandemic but is a key determinant of health and financial security. It is vital that Ohio protect the ability of its residents to remain in their homes.

AARP advocated for Congress to include rental assistance funding in federal COVID-19 relief packages and were very pleased to support the DeWine Administration's prior Controlling Board request to distribute rental assistance funds through local Community Action Agencies. As such, we are hopeful that our support for the measure before you will also be favorably considered, and HB 167 will be expeditiously passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor DeWine.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our testimony in support of HB 167, please feel free to contact AARP Ohio if we can be of assistance in the committee's deliberations.

Real Possibilities