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Testimony in Support of SB 158
Zack Eckles, Attorney
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Zack Eckles, and I am an attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center advocates for evidence-based policies that protect and expand the rights of low-income Ohioans. We are a non-profit law firm working closely with Ohio's legal aid community, serving Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 158, regarding expungement of eviction case court files.

An eviction record can have significant negative consequences for a person's credit and ability to find safe and secure housing regardless of whether the eviction was dismissed, was not the fault of the tenant, or is no longer indicative of their ability to pay rent. For example, if the rental property is foreclosed on, or the landlord passes away and their children inherit the property, or if the landlord just wants to remove the property from the rental market, a tenant could face an eviction through no fault of their own if they are not able to quickly find new housing.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's Gap Report,¹ Ohio has an estimated 443,717 extremely low-income renter households (making less than 30% of the area median income) across the state, and only 189,172 affordable and available rental homes for them. This means that for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in the state, there are only 43 affordable and available rental homes. For every 100 Ohioans at or below 50% of area median income there are only 79 affordable and available rental homes.

The extreme lack of affordable housing available for low-income households in Ohio simultaneously makes it more likely they will face an eviction through no fault of their own and exacerbates the negative effects of the resulting eviction record. Local courts across the state are recognizing the importance of eviction record sealing in this housing shortage and are already providing ways for tenants to have their eviction records removed from online public access. Unfortunately, the eligibility criteria and processes vary and are not available to all renters who have an eviction in their past, especially those in rural areas.

SB 158 would extend the opportunity to seal eviction records to all renters in Ohio and set the minimum protections available for low-income renters whose records are preventing them from finding safe and affordable housing.

For these reasons, I urge you to support SB 158.

¹ <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/oh>