



Dustin McKee - SB 57 Testimony

Ohio Senate Ways & Means Committee - February 23, 2021

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Minority Member Williams, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 57 to exempt Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) from property taxation. My name is Dustin McKee and I am the Executive Director of the Make A Day Foundation. Our Foundation provides advocacy and direct outreach to individuals who are homeless and suffer from mental health and substance use disorders.

As you know, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) serves thousands of vulnerable Ohioans with behavioral health related disabilities. Other witnesses have done an exceptional job explaining why subjecting Permanent Supportive Housing to property taxation is bad policy that will result in serious cost increases to our health, behavioral health and criminal justice systems.

Clearly, mental health disorders and addictions are less responsive to treatment if you are living in your car, an abandoned building or a homeless camp. Housing is the linchpin that allows our behavioral health system to provide the wraparound services that keep people out of the emergency room, psychiatric hospitals, jails and the graveyard. Right now, we don't have nearly enough of it.

To really appreciate how vital PSH is in supporting those with behavioral health disorders, some historical context can be useful.

I attended graduate school at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Those of you familiar with Athens are probably also familiar with the giant complex of Victorian-era buildings on the top of the hill near the University. Although we don't use these words anymore, these buildings comprised what used to be referred to as the Athens Asylum for the Insane, and later, the Athens State Hospital, which was founded in 1874.

At its peak, that hospital housed and treated thousands of people with mental health and other related disorders and was the largest employer in Athens. By the 1990's we fully transitioned away from an institution-based system to a community-based mental health system. This was possible because of better pharmaceuticals, therapies and medical procedures. The point of bringing this up is emphasize that when we transitioned to a non-institutional behavioral health system, housing was an afterthought.

When we closed these **state-funded** and **state-operated** mental health institutions that **treated and housed** people with serious mental illness over the long term, a lot of people fell through the cracks. You have probably seen them here, mentally ill and homeless on Capitol Square or in your hometowns - the same people we are trying to serve now with Permanent Supportive Housing, already in short supply.

I have worked with many of you over the years to address this mental health crisis, and this hard work will be undermined without this legislation. We need to build our PSH stock, not allow new property taxes to reduce access to this essential resource. Our behavioral health system cannot work without it.

I would like to thank Senators Antonio and Hackett again for introducing this legislation and addressing this urgent matter. Thank you again for allowing me to testify today, I am happy to take any questions you have at this time.