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Rep. Jarrells:

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Issacsohn, and esteemed Members of the House Civil Justice Committee, I extend my sincere gratitude for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 438, known as the “Homebuyer Protection Act.” This bipartisan legislation marks a pivotal stride towards establishing an equitable platform for all potential homebuyers, irrespective of their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliations. It underscores our collective resolve to dismantle barriers and foster inclusivity within the homebuying process.

My distinguished joint sponsor has adeptly illuminated the intricacies of this bill. Therefore, I will focus my testimony on the pressing need for such reform, reinforced by compelling evidence and personal accounts that lay bare the pervasiveness of discrimination within our current real estate landscape.

In 2023, the National Association of Realtors released findings from a comprehensive study, revealing that approximately one in six prospective buyers encountered discrimination across various races and ethnicities. Alarming, a significant majority of Black (63%), Asian (60%), and Hispanic (52%) respondents attributed these discriminatory practices to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Moreover, the Kinder Institute for Urban Research presented a harrowing account of discrimination, including a seller’s refusal to transact with a Middle Eastern client under the prejudiced and unfounded belief of not wanting to “support terrorists.” Such instances of blatant racism were further compounded by reports of sellers rejecting black buyers, fearing a negative impact on property values for their predominantly white neighborhoods. It is disheartening to note that this report also revealed that real estate agents seldom challenged these discriminatory attitudes or refused to collaborate with clients harboring such biases.

Discrimination extends beyond race and ethnicity, as evidenced by instances where individuals were denied opportunities to purchase homes based on their marital status, sexual orientation, or political beliefs. These actions not only contravene the spirit of Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 but also underscore the insidious nature of de facto discrimination that persists in the private sector of the housing market.

The “Homebuyer Protection Act” seeks to address these injustices head-on. By empowering buyers to redact personal identifying information from their offers, we can mitigate the influence of unconscious biases and overt discrimination in the homebuying process. This measure does not merely aim to obscure the identity of buyers; it endeavors to spotlight the merit of each offer, ensuring decisions are made based on objective criteria rather than prejudiced perceptions.

In conclusion, House Bill 438 represents a critical step towards rectifying the historical inequities that have marred the housing market. By championing this legislation, we affirm our commitment to fairness, dignity, and equality for all Ohioans seeking to secure a place they can call home.

Thank you all for allowing us to provide remarks on HB 438. We look forward to answering any questions you have.

Thank you.

