



**PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 499
HOUSE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

**Sarah Biehl, Policy Director
May 21, 2024**

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony for HB 499.

As a bipartisan coalition of mayors in Ohio's 30 largest cities and suburbs, we are well aware that Ohio cities of all sizes need more housing of all types and at all price points. Our cities are taking a range of actions—from crafting new zoning laws to demolishing blighted properties to incentivizing homeownership—that will increase the availability and affordability of safe housing for all Ohio families. Most of those initiatives are the same policies that HB 499 encourages. This makes sense because when we know something works to achieve a mutually beneficial policy goal, we learn from each other and do more of it.

Moreover, our metropolitan regions are vast and interconnected. More affordable housing in one city benefits surrounding communities by easing costs and providing residents with a wider range of options in more locations to meet their families' needs. When our cities have the resources and tools they need to create more needed housing, it eases pressure on smaller towns and rural areas that may struggle to quickly build the infrastructure to manage shifting populations. The specific solutions may look different, but our connections to each other also make all of our local initiatives more effective.

HB 499 will complement our cities' efforts to promote more housing construction and renovation with much needed resources. Local government leaders know best what their communities need, and HB 499 grants wide discretion to cities to implement a range of pro-housing policies that work for them without mandating any one particular policy or approach statewide. It also gives local governments the ability to decide *not* to implement any of the policies, if they choose. We believe that a permissive approach, with flexibility that allows for local innovation, is the ideal way for state and local governments to collaborate to address big issues like housing affordability that impact us all, but in different ways.

We also believe strongly in crafting bipartisan solutions to big problems. We deeply appreciate the time Representatives Isaacsohn and Mathews have invested to find common ground on this issue. The need for more housing impacts every Ohioan, and the solutions require a focus on what we agree on and what we can get done together. At the same time, this bill strikes a balance between promoting effective policies and giving local governments the flexibility they need to select their own course of action.

Thus, we urge you to support HB 499.