



**OHIO HOUSE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE**  
**April 23, 2024**

**Written Interested Party Testimony**  
**House Bill 315**

Chair John, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony regarding House Bill 315, legislation that would make a variety of changes related to the administration of township government in Ohio. As the statewide association that represents more than 730 of Ohio's cities and villages, the Ohio Municipal League's interest in this bill mainly relates to the provisions that overlap with the interests of our municipal members.

Specific to the provisions in House Bill 315, there are two areas of benefit to municipalities -- which the league is supportive of but feels more should be done -- that we would like to highlight:

**Modernization of Zoning Regulations**

The bill appropriates \$1.5 million each for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025 for the Ohio Department of Development to offer grants to help modernize zoning regulations and processes. In February, this committee accepted an amendment to expand these grants beyond townships to any Ohio political subdivision. The league appreciates the expansion of this grant opportunity which will now allow cities and villages to participate.

As this committee is aware, the financial investment required to perform a comprehensive review and update of local land use laws is considerable, and many of Ohio's municipalities do not have the financial ability to complete these important updates. In addition to these financial constraints, municipalities often are without the technical bandwidth or internal expertise to complete the tasks required to modernize zoning laws, so this partnership opportunity with the state is critical and very timely.

In recognition of the amount of assistance that is required for municipalities and Ohio's other political subdivisions to modernize zoning codes, we hope that you will consider that the current proposal for \$3 million over the biennium appropriation is considerably less than what would be needed for the funding to make the intended impact that the proposal deserves. **The league is asking that the members of this committee consider increasing the appropriation amount to \$10 million over the biennium** for these modernized zoning grants, which would allow the program to be more impactful on a statewide basis – even though still not meeting the full need throughout the state.

## **Indigent Burial and Cremation Support Program**

The bill appropriates \$1 million each for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025 to the Indigent Burial and Cremation Support Program. Providing burials and cremations for indigent deceased persons is the responsibility of local governments, including municipalities. OML supports this appropriation, as the program allows local governments to apply for reimbursement of costs charged or contracted by a funeral home, but it should be better funded.

The current lack of funding in the state operating budget has prevented the Ohio Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors from reimbursing these costs, therefore leading to the suspension of the program on July 1, 2023. The appropriation for the program is welcome, but we are concerned that the need outpaces the obligation. Consequently, we respectfully recommend a combined appropriation over the biennium of \$5 million.

Additionally, the league and our members would like to share with the committee concerns with the language changing the current New Community Authority provision. As currently written, the bill allows an urban township, which is any township with a population of 15,000 or more that has adopted a limited home rule government, to serve as the organizational board of commissioners for a New Community district.

The general concern the league has with this new authority, which would be granted to a limited amount of townships in a specific location of the state, is the challenge with keeping that authority only to those select “urban” unincorporated areas and not eventually expanding this new community authority – that has revenue generation/taxing ability – to be available to all of Ohio’s 1,300 townships.

It is troubling to many league members that a slippery slope continues to unfold, in which the growth and scope of authorities being provided township government continues to grow through state policy – even if confined to only a few townships in this example. As townships are given more authority akin to municipalities, committee members should be reminded that townships do not have the vast amount of service responsibilities and administrative components that municipal corporations have and are subject to through state law and the Ohio Constitution, and municipalities do not benefit from some of the areas of subsidization from which Ohio’s townships benefit.

Instead of the state continuing to provide unincorporated governments more municipal-like authorities, townships that want these powers and areas of local control should incorporate and join the ranks of the current cities and villages in Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on sections of House Bill 315, and we appreciate all the hard work this committee does.



Kent Scarrett  
Executive Director  
Ohio Municipal League