

Jeff Lehner
Proponent Testimony
House Bill 1, 135th General Assembly

Chairman Roemer, members of the Committee, my name is Jeff Lehner. I am Ross County's incoming Auditor after having won in November with nearly 67% of votes cast. Congratulations to you all for your own victories last Fall and thank you for stepping up to help lead Ohio. Before I begin I want to make clear that I'm here to speak only for myself as a citizen & local community leader, and not as a representative of the County Auditors' Association which I understand has not taken an official position on the matter before you.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 1's concepts. I understand this bill to be a work in progress with some fiscal details to be worked out, but I am here to support the general idea of tax relief for Ohioans, including property tax relief. In my campaign, I talked a lot with the people of Ross County about how county governments in Ohio are funded primarily by taxes & fees that hit working class people hardest. The less you earn, the greater the share of your income that your property tax bill represents.

Property tax bills in Ross County this year are up 20-30%, in some cases more than 40%, for the local increase in home valuations following last year's state-mandated triennial update. I have spoken with many Ross County residents in recent weeks about the prospect of tax relief and I have yet to hear from anyone who wouldn't like to pay less. I learned recently of House Bill 1 and in studying its provisions I have come to see it as a great opportunity to do financial good for Ohio's workers and families.

Housing costs as we all are aware are a major driver of inflation. The logical extension of this for our purposes is that Ross County's 20-30-40% property tax bill increases this year are inflation-driven. My point in saying this is that it's common to hear politicians (of which I am one now, so no slight intended here) talk about what they're going to do about inflation. What's not as common is that they actually follow through. You as members of this committee through House Bill 1 and the state budget process have an opportunity to respond to inflation in a very specific way by providing tax relief for Ohioans. I hope you will take it, and I even have a few ideas of my own if you're interested in hearing them.

I want to say also – I agree with the idea of putting Ohio on a path toward eliminating our state income tax. The axiom goes, "When you tax something, you get less of it." If we want more income for Ohioans, one really good way to get it is to stop taxing incomes and put more money in people's pockets to spend as they see fit.

Thank you again for this opportunity, I would be happy to answer any questions you have.